

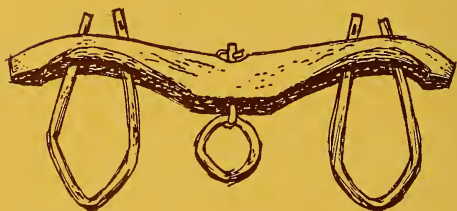


IRVING STONE'S
Love Is Eternal

DRAMATIZED BY RUTH SERGEL

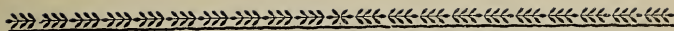
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A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

IRVING STONE'S

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CHICAGO



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Love Is Eternal

A Play in Three Acts

FOR FOURTEEN MEN AND SIXTEEN WOMEN

MARY (TODD) LINCOLN.....
.....	<i>of Kentucky, Springfield and Washington</i>
ROBERT TODD.....	<i>her father</i>
BETSY (HUMPHREYS) TODD.....	<i>her stepmother</i>
GRANDMA PARKER.....	<i>her grandmother</i>
ANN TODD.....	<i>her younger sister</i>
ELIZABETH (TODD) EDWARDS.....	<i>her oldest sister</i>
NINIAN EDWARDS.....	<i>her brother-in-law</i>
MAMMY SALLY.....	<i>her old nurse</i>
TAMAR.....	<i>a slave</i>
DR. WARD.....	<i>a teacher</i>
SANDY McDONALD.....	<i>a friend</i>
CASSIUS CLAY.....	<i>an abolitionist</i>
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.....	<i>young lawyer and President</i>
STEPHEN DOUGLAS.....	<i>his rival</i>
MERCY LEVERING.....	<i>friend of Mary Todd</i>
JAMES CONKLING.....	<i>friend of Mercy Levering</i>
ALLIE.....	<i>a freed woman</i>
DR. HOUGHAN.....	<i>a friend of the Edwards</i>
MRS. HOUGHAN.....	<i>his wife</i>
REVEREND DRESSER.....	<i>a minister</i>
MRS. DRESSER.....	<i>his wife</i>
SARAH MARSHALL.....	<i>an abolitionist</i>
ELIZABETH GRIMSLEY.....	<i>Mary's cousin</i>
WILLIAM STODDARD.....	<i>assistant to the President</i>
EDWIN STANTON.....	<i>Secretary of War</i>
JANE WATT.....	<i>stewardess at the White House</i>
FIRST CALLER.....	<i>a troubled woman</i>
TAXPAYER.....	<i>a determined woman</i>

TAD LINCOLN.....youngest of the Lincoln sons
STACKPOLE.....doorkeeper at the White House
AUCTIONEER'S VOICE AND OTHER OFFSTAGE VOICES

PLACE: *Act One: The drawing room of the Todd home in Lexington, Kentucky.*

Act Two: The drawing room of the Edwards home in Springfield, Illinois.

Act Three: The family sitting room in the west wing of the White House.

TIME: *Before and during the Civil War.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE: *The drawing room of the Todd home in Lexington, Kentucky. Morning.*

ACT TWO, *Scene One: The drawing room of the Edwards home in Springfield, Illinois. Evening.*

Scene Two: The same. Shortly after daybreak of a hot August morning, two years later.

ACT THREE: *The family sitting room in the west wing of the White House. About ten o'clock of a hot summer morning, during the Civil War.*

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

MARY TODD: In Act One she is a young girl, still in her teens. She is beautiful, but there is also a great deal of character in her face. She is rather vain, fond of pretty clothes and an excellent dancer. She is also intelligent, idealistic, warm-hearted, impulsive, with a quick temper and an ironic wit that will make her more enemies than friends. In Acts Two and Three we see the logical development of these qualities as Mary copes with more demanding situations. In Act One, Mary may wear a daytime dress of cotton in some gay, pastel color—yellow, pink or light blue. She may wear a small fitted bonnet with matching ribbon streamers, and short white gloves of some sheer material. Her movements are swift and impulsive.

In Act Two, Scene One, Mary's dress may be an attractive party dress in vivid color. It and her accessories are more grown-up in type. She wears a slip underneath and one or two crinoline underskirts. She wears her hair in a more elaborate arrangement, with a curl on her shoulder and with a touch of artificial flowers. Her movements are still impulsive and quick but she is more poised than in Act One.

In Act Two, Scene Two, Mary wears a light flowered robe over the slip she wore in Scene One. Presumably she has just risen from her bed and come down to walk in the garden after a rather sleepless night in summer. Her hair is caught into a loose knot at the back of her head, with a few stray curls escaping as if she had brushed it back and stuck a few pins in it but had not really arranged it yet for the day. The effect is of informal charm. Her manner is more quiet and contained than in Scene One. She is two years older, and she has experienced a bitter disappointment.

In Act Three, years have elapsed and Mary is older. Her dress may be black or a dark blue, or gray or rose. Her hair is

arranged very simply, parted in the middle and drawn back and up with a back comb. She moves more slowly in this act, but the fiery spirit is still there and shows in her important speeches.

ROBERT TODD: He is a middle-aged banker, a little stout. He is happy in his second marriage but concerned by the widening rift he senses it has caused between him and the children of his first marriage. He is idealistic but is limited by the realities of the situation in which he finds himself. He may wear a bell-shaped blue coat, white linen trousers strapped under his boots and a high collar topping a ruffled lace shirt front, or he may wear a more conservative outfit, a black dress coat, a black satin waistcoat, a white shirt and black stock.

BETSY TODD: She is a rather plain-faced woman devoted to her husband and conscientiously striving to do her duty to the children of her husband's first marriage. She wears her hair parted in the middle, with short front curls and the remainder drawn into a knot with a high-backed comb. Her dress is dull in color with a full skirt, natural waistline, and brooch at neck. She is patient and forbearing but capable of flaring up when her husband is blamed.

GRANDMA PARKER: She lives nearby and is the grandmother of the first family of Todd children. She bitterly resents Todd's second marriage, and her criticisms have made all of her grandchildren—except Mary—dislike their stepmother. She is prying, cynical and has a mannerism of closing one eye as she confides her bits of worldly wisdom and devices for getting around people. She is preferably a large woman and wears her hair wound round her head in tight braids. She wears a dark silk, long-sleeved dress with old-fashioned jewelry.

MAMMY SALLY: Technically she is a slave but actually she is the loved tyrant of the household, convinced that she knows what is best for all of them. She is large, elderly, and outspoken. This part should not be played in black face, but a brown-tone make-up should be used. Her dress is a dark cotton, and she wears a white apron.

TAMAR: She is a slave belonging to the Stevens (friends of

the Todds). So far her lot has been easy. She is married to a fellow slave and has a baby daughter. Tamar is beautiful and young. She wears a trim, neat dress of cotton suited to her status as house servant in a prosperous household.

DR. WARD: He is rather elderly with white hair, a scholarly face and a pleasant, understanding manner. He has kept his youthful heart because he has been close to his pupils throughout the long years of his teaching experience. He wears a black coat, loose black trousers, a white shirt with a stand-up collar and a black string tie.

ANN TODD: Mary's younger sister. She lacks Mary's fire, intelligence and good looks. In fact, she is rather spiteful and envious of her older sisters. Ann is moody in temperament and inclined to brood over fancied slights. She wears a dress similar to Mary's, but Ann's is a print with a three-tier ruffled skirt and an effect of over-decoration.

STEPHEN DOUGLAS: A powerful man, clean shaven, quite short, with a massive head and thick curly brown hair. He has a magnificent voice and a charming and very dynamic personality. His reactions are always quick and to the point. He wears the dark clothes of the period, a white shirt with a stand-up collar and black bow tie.

NINIAN EDWARDS: He is tall and handsome with inherited wealth and social position. He is an excellent lawyer and also a bit pompous in manner. He wears a dark suit with a handsome waistcoat.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: He has a long, thin body, a shock of coarse black hair and a thin face, clean shaven, with hollow cheeks and bushy eyebrows. In Act Two, Scene One, his natural awkwardness is accentuated by the fact that his clothes are too small for him, the sleeves and trousers too short. He moves slowly and is apt to sit in awkward postures, with his knees high and his hands clasping them. He is never glib, and he considers before he speaks. His delivery is drawling but he has an inherent dignity and natural authority. His manner is often melancholy and withdrawn, yet occasionally his face lights up and he tells a funny story with tremendous gusto and success. In

Act Two, Scene Two, he is two years older. His clothes now fit him. He wears a dark suit, white shirt and black string tie tied in a bow. He seems dazed and overwrought at first but becomes himself again as he is reconciled with Mary.

In Act Three, he is older and careworn. He now wears a beard. He is dressed as in Act Two, Scene Two, but the string tie may be carelessly tied.

MERCY LEVERING: She is a reddish blonde, about nineteen, with a pretty figure and fashionable clothes. She is very correct and always sits with her feet primly together. Mercy might be daring in choosing a hat, but she is very conventional and conservative in her thinking. She wears an attractive party dress similar in style to Mary's but lighter in color and over-elaborate. Her hair is elaborately done up with flowers and ribbon.

ALLIE: She is a young freed woman serving as maid in the Edwards' home. She attempts to seem the correct servant but clearly shows her interest in the personal affairs of the household. She wears a black uniform with a neat white cap, white cuffs and small white apron.

ELIZABETH TODD EDWARDS: Mary's oldest sister. She is beautiful, tranquil, and kind, with a conservative mind and a great love of the orderly and the traditional. Because, though only eleven when their mother died, she took over for a while the responsibility of the family, she still feels a motherly concern for the future of her sisters. She is proud of the high social rating of the Edwards family, devoted to her husband and concerned to do her part in furthering his political career. In Act Two, Scene One, she wears a handsome evening dress. In Act Two, Scene Two, she wears a cotton house dress appropriate for an early morning in summer.

SANDY MC DONALD: He is young, with sandy hair and of medium height. He shows his Scotch ancestry. Most people don't know his Christian name is Thomas. He is attractive and warm-hearted, with much to offer Mary Todd in the way of worldly goods. He accepts, without questioning, the customs of the slave society in which he was born. He is dressed as a young dandy of the period.

CASSIUS CLAY: He is an abolitionist and the brother of Henry Clay. He has white hair, aristocratic features and bearing and an intensity of purpose that command attention. He is a long-time friend of the Todd family. He wears a black suit, white shirt with a stand-up collar and a black string tie carelessly knotted.

SARAH MARSHALL: She is an abolitionist and a Quaker. She is young and beautiful, and the depth of her convictions makes her words compelling. Her clothing is without fashionable fripperies and her hair is arranged simply.

ELIZABETH GRIMSLEY: She is Mary's cousin and assistant. She is in her early twenties, tall, graceful and competent. She speaks with decision.

JANE WATT: She is the wife of the White House gardener and is the stewardess supervising the White House servants. She is independent in manner without being impertinent. She wears a plain afternoon-type dress with neat frills at neck and cuffs.

WILLIAM STODDARD: He is about twenty-six years old, with an intelligent, attractive face and an alert manner. He is a journalist on the staff of the President. He is devoted to Lincoln and to Mrs. Lincoln. He wears a dark coat, loose trousers and a carelessly tied black string tie.

FIRST CALLER: She is a quiet, middle-aged woman under the stress of intense emotion. Her clothes are neither stylish nor new. She clutches a worn black purse. She is pale and a little plump; desperation overcomes her natural timidity.

TAXPAYER: She is a middle-aged woman, angular, spinsterly, determined, outspoken and forceful. She is plainly dressed in unfashionable clothing chosen for wear.

TAD LINCOLN: He is between seven and ten years old. A spoiled brat—in the opinion of the staff—but the particular favorite of his father. He may wear a round jacket and knickers bagging at the knees and striped stockings.

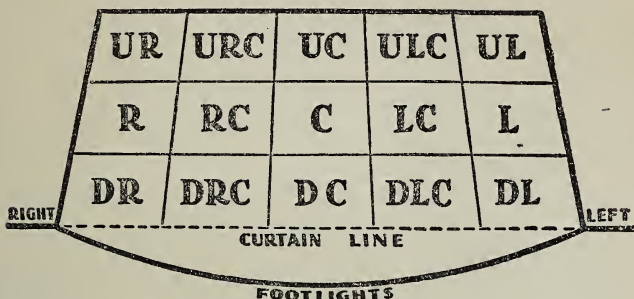
STACKPOLE: He is doorman of the Lincoln family rooms in the White House. He also makes himself useful in other ways, and so he is not always on duty. He wears an ordinary dark

suit. He is a little plump and middle-aged—well meaning and not particularly effective.

EDWIN STANTON: He is extremely dignified in manner and his clothes are of the period, conservative and in good taste. He is very conscious of his importance as Secretary of War. On his first entrance, he speaks impressively and with great dignity. This is in marked contrast with his anger and disheveled appearance on his second entry. He is extremely able and has a repressed sense of humor.

NOTE: If the director wishes to use additional extras for the buffet dinner in Act Two, suitable names are: Mr. John Stuart, Misses Lizzie and Ann Rodney, Dr. and Mrs. John Todd, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Edwards, Dr. Henry, Mrs. Butler and Mr. Justice Brown.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS

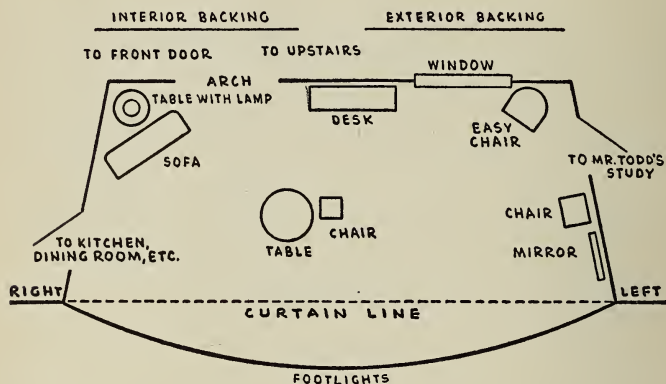


STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

STAGE CHARTS



ACT I

For charts of furniture rearrangements for Acts II and III see page 103.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: *Act One*: Heavy draperies at window, two easy chairs, sofa, two small tables, small desk or secretary, straight chair, lamp on table U R, accessories on desk, box of flowers on table behind sofa, books and papers scattered on desk, piece of paper on floor near desk. *Act Two*: Lace curtains at window, two easy chairs, couch, two small tables, one large table, two straight chairs, small desk or table, bell strap on wall U C, lamps on tables, evergreens for decoration (Scene One), bowl of roses and some fallen petals on table R (Scene Two). *Act Three*: Draperies at window, desk, easy chairs, tables, lamps on tables, straight chair, small table, couch, framed portraits of earlier presidents or first ladies (optional), replica of seal of the United States (optional), pad and pencil on desk, four piles of letters on desk, news clippings on table U L, document in a desk drawer, pen on desk. NOTE: In all cases, additional furnishings and incidentals, such as lamps or ornaments, may be added to complete the setting.

MARY: Book, dish of oranges, cup of hot tea.

MRS. TODD: Embroidery work with wooden embroidery hoop, small handkerchief.

GRANDMA PARKER: Pieces of broken cup, reticule.

ANN: Small medicine bottle.

MR. TODD: Two letters, one open and the other unopened; large white handkerchief.

MAMMY SALLY: Tea tray with tea service for two and a plate of cookies.

NINIAN: Newspaper.

MERCY: Workbag containing needlepoint on which she is working.

DOUGLAS: Small wrapped parcel containing a thimble, newspaper.

ELIZABETH: Dishes of bonbons, beribboned card basket, dishes of almonds, cards for card basket, small lace handkerchief.

ALLIE: Tray with coffee service for two, large white cake, bride-and-groom figures (as for a wedding cake), small bowl of fresh flowers.

BETH: Unopened letters and letter opener.

FIRST CALLER: Handbag.

TAD: Handkerchief.

STODDARD: Portfolio, several newspapers.

TAXPAYER: Umbrella.

STACKPOLE: Tray holding coffee service and plate of toast, packet of mail.

STANTON: Envelope containing dispatches.

NOTES ON STAGING

SETTINGS: With the exception of the addition of a straight chair in Act III, the set can be the same throughout except for variation in placing the furniture, as indicated on the stage charts. Decorations and trim such as pictures, curtains, and similar items, should be varied as much as is convenient between each act.

The window that is draped and covered in Act One should appear in Act Two without drapes.

In Act One some of the walls may have pictures. By removing them and leaving the walls fairly bare a quite different effect can be achieved. In Act Three, which takes place in the White House, many very simple but very appropriate decorations may be used if it is desired. Portraits or reproductions of earlier presidents, particularly Washington, replicas of the government seal, eagles, etc., all could be used to change and enhance the appearance of the set.

The lighting may be varied by the fact that Act One occurs during daylight hours. Though the drapes cover the window, the general effect should be of natural lighting, and lamps should not be lit. In Act Two, Scene One, the action takes place during the evening. All lamps should be brightly lit as for a party. Scene Two of Act Two occurs in the morning and should be lighted naturally, as if most of the light comes through the window. In Act Three, an effort should be made to keep the lighting a very slight degree dimmer than in the first two acts. This might be achieved by replacing some amber gelatines with blue.

TEMPO: Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living room of the Todd home in Lexington, Kentucky is pleasant, dignified and furnished in the style of the period. There is an archway U R C, from which a hallway leads to the front door R and to the rest of the house and upstairs L. A door D R leads to the kitchen, and U L is a door to Mr. Todd's study. In the rear wall, U L C, is a window with heavy draperies over it. (This window is not used except as occasionally someone holds the draperies aside and seems to look out of it. It supposedly affords a view of the corner of the square where slaves are auctioned.) There are easy chairs U L and D L, a couch U R and a small table with a lamp behind the couch. A small box of flowers is on this. U C is a small desk or secretary. C is a small table, with a straight chair left of it. Other furnishings may be added as desired.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: MAMMY SALLY *enters from D R. She glances over the room, looks back over her shoulder and then crosses U L C to the window with the drawn draperies. She tilts her head and listens closely, glances around to be sure she is not observed and then holds the draperies aside and looks through it off L. MRS. TODD enters D R. She has in her hands a bit of embroidery, held in place by a wooden embroidery hoop. She pauses just inside the door when she sees MAMMY SALLY peering out the window.]*

MRS. TODD [*speaking sharply*]. Mammy Sally!

MAMMY SALLY [*frightened, dropping the draperies and turning around*]. Yes'm.

MRS. TODD. Mr. Todd has given orders those draperies are never to be drawn!

MAMMY SALLY. Yes, ma'am. Onliest thing I was seein' iffen the window need cleanin'.

MRS. TODD [*crossing to table D C*]. Miss Mary might have come in. [*Sits and begins to embroider.*] If the older members of the family don't respect the rules, neither will the young people.

MAMMY SALLY [*crossing to upstage of table D C*]. I'll be mighty keerful—been a long time sence my baby Miss Mary wake in the night and scream they whuppin' the slaves out in the square. [*Gestures toward window.*]

MRS. TODD. It was the worst thing that could have happened—an impressionable child like Mary to see that Negro lashed!

MAMMY SALLY. Long time, too, sence Miss Mary have nightmare she seein' Miss Turner throw that baby down into the courtyard 'cause he cry.

MRS. TODD [*earnestly, putting aside her embroidery and leaning forward, hands clasped*]. Mammy Sally, why—why does it happen that it's always Mary who sees these horrible things? Her sisters would never take it the way she does!

MAMMY SALLY [*with quiet conviction*]. Ain't nothin' happen 'gainst God's will.

MRS. TODD [*looking up at her*]. But Mary saw it *both* times! It's given her such a feeling about slavery! And, after all, no one but Mrs. Turner is violent-tempered enough to kill a child. And most people don't beat their slaves.

MAMMY SALLY [*quietly*]. Don't they, ma'am?

MRS. TODD [*brushing it aside and resuming her embroidery*]. Where is Mary, anyway?

MAMMY SALLY. Miss Mary here no more'n ten minutes ago ruinin' her pretty eyes over them books! [*Moves U C to desk and indicates where books and papers are carelessly littered.*]

MRS. TODD [*surprised and annoyed*]. She shouldn't have been studying in here!

MAMMY SALLY [*turning to face her*]. Cain't study in her room. . . . Miss Ann say it her room, too. She won't stop singin' an' hummin'.

MRS. TODD. Well, put the books away. Someone might come in and suspect about Mary's college training.

MAMMY SALLY [*in a grumbling tone*]. My back powerful bad to-day. [*Stoops for a paper on the floor.*] Old Miss' Parker say all this eddication makin' Miss Mary unladylike. [*Gathers books into neat pile.*]

MRS. TODD. That's what everyone will say if they find out. [*Pushes her hair back with a listless gesture.*] They'll say, too, that Mary's own mother would never have allowed it. It's hard to be a stepmother!

MAMMY SALLY [*crossing to C with some books and slowly spelling out the title on one*]. A-L-G-E-B-R-A. Who that Al Gebra?

MRS. TODD. Never mind. [*Holds embroidery off, scanning the effect.*]

MAMMY SALLY [*taking up another book*]. M-O-L-I-E-R-E. [*Riffles through pages.*] Words don't make no sense.

MRS. TODD. That's a great French dramatist. Remember how proud we were when Miss Mary played the lead at the girls' school? She can read French now as easily as English.

MAMMY SALLY. Plenty books in *English* without my baby strain her eyes over this.

MRS. TODD [*smiling, putting down her embroidery and standing*]. Don't worry, Mammy Sally, today's commencement.

MAMMY SALLY [*sniffing indignantly*]. C'mmencement! Miss Mary ain't happy 'bout that c'mmencement.

MRS. TODD. Oh, Mammy—you imagine that!

MAMMY SALLY. She put her head on my shoulder and say all the boys gits to sit on the platform and listen to the speakin' and singin' and gets them a diplomy with they name in gold letters. Mr. Sandy and all of 'em.

MRS. TODD [*wearily*]. Oh, Mammy, that's just childishness! Miss Mary has the education. The diploma doesn't matter.

MAMMY SALLY [*stubbornly*]. Matters to my baby. Matters a lot to her!

MRS. TODD [*ending it*]. Well, put the books away. Don't just stand there holding them!

MAMMY SALLY [*crossing back to desk and stowing the books neatly away*]. Somethin' upset Miss Mary . . . she studyin' hard when I through here a while ago. [*Crosses to window and slightly touches drapes.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage, heard faintly so that the words are almost indistinguishable*]. Gentlemen, I offer you this field hand—[*Both WOMEN listen a moment, then MAMMY SALLY lets drapes fall in place and glances at MRS. TODD.*]

MRS. TODD [*concerned*]. Poor, unfortunate slaves! Mary didn't notice anything—[*Hesitates and gestures with her head toward draped window*—out there?

MAMMY SALLY [*stolidly, crossing to desk*]. Ain't been much to notice—yet. Just a regular auction, but later on they sellin' off a family—mother, father, baby girl, little boy.

MRS. TODD [*disturbed, crossing to in front of sofa*]. They are? If I'd known, I'd have asked Mr. Sandy to take Miss Mary for a drive. [*Indicates box of flowers on table behind sofa.*] He left these flowers.

MAMMY SALLY. Mistah Sandy powerful sweet on my baby.

MRS. TODD [*crossing back to table and standing beside it on D R edge*]. It would be a fine match. [*Picks up her embroidery.*] I'd like to see Mary do as well as her older sister.

MAMMY SALLY [*coming to upstage side of table*]. Miss Elizabeth mighty lucky girl marryin' the son of the governor of Illinois.

MRS. TODD. Sandy McDonald's parents are just as prominent in Mississippi.

[*As the two WOMEN are speaking, ANN TODD starts to enter from door D R, then pauses in the doorway and stands listening, unobserved.*]

MAMMY SALLY. Mississippi awful far away for my baby to go from her papa. He don' like it Miss 'Lizabeth 'way off in Illinois, an' Miss Mary his special pet.

MRS. TODD. It's the way of the world. Young folks grow up and marry and start their own homes.

MAMMY SALLY. Ain't many brave enough to take on a whole passel of stepchildren like you done, ma'am.

MRS. TODD. I've tried hard to do my duty by my six stepchildren but as long as they're here, their grandmother will come to see them and set them against me. . . . [*Drops work on table.*]

MAMMY SALLY [*quickly taking a step toward* MRS. TODD]. Not Miss Mary—nor Miss 'Lizabeth.

MRS. TODD. No—not them. But the others?

MAMMY SALLY [*conceding it*]. Old Grandma Parker shore is Satan's right hand!

MRS. TODD. Even with Mary, who's closest to me—I'll still be glad when I can have just my own children, their father, my own home! [*Wipes her forehead with a tiny handkerchief.*] Is that a bad thing to feel, Mammy Sally?

MAMMY SALLY [*eyeing her keenly*]. Your head achin' again? Come upstairs and lie down a while. [*Gently assists* MRS. TODD *through archway* U R C *and off* L.] I'll put a cold cloth on it.

[ANN *enters* D R *and stands staring after them resentfully with hands on hips. She moves to* R C, *mimicking* MRS. TODD's *languid voice.*]

ANN. "No—not them!" Not the pets—Elizabeth and Mary! But me and Frances and the boys—we're the four black sheep!

[MARY *enters from other side of archway. She has a book in her hand.*]

MARY [*pausing in doorway, her voice gay and vibrant*]. Black sheep, Ann? For the lawn? What fun! [*Crosses swiftly to desk and puts book on it.*] I like them much better than those blank-faced white ones! [*Begins to pull off her gloves.*]

ANN [*sourly*]. Then raise them when you go to live on your big Mississippi plantation! [*Faces front.*]

MARY. What are you fussing about now? [*Sees box on table U R.*] Oh, flowers! [*Crosses swiftly, takes box from table and opens it on couch.*] From Sandy! [*Takes out flowers, smells them, goes to mirror D L and tries them against her hair, on her shoulder and at her wrist. Finally, she pins them to her dress.*]

ANN. Better try for more than flowers. Our dear stepmother— [*With sarcastic emphasis.*—thinks it's high time you got a proposal out of him.

MARY [*whirling around*]. She never said that!

ANN [*facing MARY*]. Oh, didn't she? Maybe she didn't say, either, that she'd be glad when we're all gone and she can have her own home and her own children and her own husband!

MARY [*troubled, taking a few steps toward L C*]. Mother said that? [*Rallying to her defense.*] Well, why wouldn't she? Grandma Parker's always criticizing her, and you and the boys believe every mean thing Grandma says.

ANN [*turning downstage*]. Maybe. Since you're so fond of her, try to get Sandy McDonald to propose. She wants you to make a big marriage—like Elizabeth.

MARY [*crossing to ANN and taking her by the shoulders, turning ANN to face her*]. She told you all that?

ANN [*not meeting her eye*]. Well—I—uh, happened to overhear . . .

MARY [*taking ANN's hand and speaking kindly*]. Oh, Ann, don't listen at doors and repeat things! I know we did as children, but we're too old for that now!

ANN [*pulling loose and backing away toward couch*]. Don't lecture me, Miss Pious! I've seen you at the window. [*Gestures toward draped window.*] How will you like it if I tell Father?

MARY. It's not the same, Ann. [*Turns with a despairing gesture.*] If Mother said any of that, she didn't mean it the way you've made it sound!

GRANDMA PARKER [*off stage D R*]. A Spode cup broken!

ANN [*with a groan*]. Grandma Parker!

MARY [*at same time*]. Grandma Parker—oh, dear! [*Both GIRLS hastily smooth their hair, adjust dresses.*]

[*GRANDMA PARKER enters D R, holding pieces of a broken cup in her hand. Both girls curtsy.*]

GRANDMA PARKER. I never in my born days saw such careless housekeeping! A Spode cup broken! Mary, Ann—how did this happen?

MARY [*crossing to her*]. Accidents do happen, Grandmother. Won't you sit here? [*She nods at chair by table C.*]

GRANDMA PARKER [*sitting in chair*]. Of course they do. That's why the cup should have been locked up in the china closet. But probably your stepmother doesn't know the difference between Spode and ironstone!

ANN [*stepping to table and egging her on*]. But our stepmother says things are made to be used.

GRANDMA PARKER [*tartly*]. Of course they are . . . but on suitable occasions.

MARY [*from near desk*]. Now, I remember. She had the Spode out when the rector and his wife came to tea. . . . Afterwards she put the broken cup aside 'til it could be mended.

GRANDMA PARKER [*a bit mollified*]. Well . . . tea for the rector . . . still, your mother never broke any of them. They were hers, and by rights one of you girls should have them when you marry.

ANN [*with emphasis*]. Yes, Mary, *when*!

GRANDMA PARKER [*not noticing*]. That boy from Mississippi, what's his name?

MARY [*reluctantly, coming to stand beside GRANDMA PARKER*].

I suppose you mean Sandy McDonald.

GRANDMA PARKER. Today's commencement. He'll be leaving

soon. Has he said anything yet? [ANN *clears her throat meaningfully, and this time* GRANDMA PARKER *notices. She gives ANN a keen look and leans back heavily in her chair during the next speech.*]

MARY [*impatiently*]. Oh, Grandmother, because a man and a girl go to parties together it doesn't mean either one of them is thinking of marriage. [GRANDMA PARKER *stiffens, gasps and clutches her chest. MARY is concerned.*] Grandma, are you sick?

GRANDMA PARKER [*feebly*]. My heart again! Open my reticule, Ann. [ANN *opens the bag and GRANDMA PARKER fumbles in it.*] No, my medicine isn't here. Get it . . . white pills on . . . bedside table . . .

ANN [*frightened, hurrying off* U R C *and* L, *upstairs*]. Shan't I send for the doctor?

MARY. Won't you need some water?

GRANDMA PARKER. No. . . . [*Opens an eye, turns her head slowly to be sure ANN is gone. Then she sits up alertly.*] I feel better already. Much better. I'm sorry I had to send Ann for my medicine, but after all, I ought to have it with me.

MARY. Ann won't mind.

GRANDMA PARKER. I know something of the McDonald family. [*With great force.*] Sandy's a catch, my girl.

MARY [*taking a step* L C]. Well, I want more than a catch. [*Turns to face GRANDMA PARKER, speaking passionately.*] I want a man with a brain and spirit and ambition and courage. [*Musingly.*] A man who will let me stand at his shoulder instead of pushing me into the wallpaper.

GRANDMA PARKER [*turning her chair around to look at MARY more fully*]. You take these young men too seriously. [*Half closes her right eye as in a wink.*] You should choose the best of the lot and let him think you're everything he wants in a wife. Then after you have him safely married, you slowly change his ideas.

MARY. But——

GRANDMA PARKER. He won't even know it's happening. [*Reverses her wink and half closes her left eye.*] Let him discover you've wit and sound judgment. Do it slowly. In five or ten years you'll have remodeled your marriage to include whatever you want—it's the plan wives have always used.

MARY. Is that what you did with Grandfather?

GRANDMA PARKER. Of course. Oh, I protected his flank in public, but at home I slowly got my own way.

[*ANN enters hurriedly from U R C, with a small medicine bottle in her hand.*]

ANN [*from upstairs U R C*]. Here's the medicine. [*Hands GRANDMA PARKER a small bottle.*]

GRANDMA PARKER [*putting bottle in her bag*]. Thank you, Ann, but I'm feeling better now. [*A bell tinkles offstage. Both GIRLS turn toward it.*]

GRANDMA PARKER. Who is it?

MARY. Probably Dr. Ward, from the College.

GRANDMA PARKER. I'll go on, then. Ann, give me your arm. [*Goes off U R C and L leaning on Ann's arm.*] Just want to speak to your stepmother about the Spode cup.

DR. WARD [*offstage U R C*]. Is Miss Mary in?

NELSON [*offstage*]. In the drawing room if you please, Dr. Ward.

DR. WARD [*elderly, gray-haired but with a young heart, enters from U R C and comes forward with his hand outstretched*]. Miss Mary! [*Bows to MARY. She curtsies lightly in response.*] They told me you called this morning. I was sorry I couldn't see you at the time.

MARY [*smiling warmly*]. Oh, that's all right, Dr. Ward. It was kind of you to stop by. It was just—I wanted to ask you something—Oh, excuse me. Please have a chair.

DR. WARD [*smiling*]. Thank you. [*Both sit on couch, MARY on the downstage side.*] And—since today's commencement and a busy time for me, perhaps we should come directly to the point. You had a question?

MARY [*hesitating*]. Well—I'm afraid you'll think it's silly.

DR. WARD [*cheerfully*]. Perhaps I won't. Try me.

MARY [*hesitating*]. It's about commencement.

DR. WARD [*seriously*]. Yes, Mary?

MARY [*rising and crossing to desk, fussing with book arrangement and speaking over her shoulder.*] After all, I did do all the work just like the boys—Sandy and the rest. . . .
[*Pauses.*]

DR. WARD [*nodding*]. You did.

MARY [*turning to face him*]. I wrote all the papers and took the examinations.

DR. WARD. You were in the top fourth. I told you that. Doesn't that make you happy, Mary?

MARY. M'm. Yes—in a way. [*Fusses with ornaments again.*]

DR. WARD. Only—in a way?

MARY. Oh, Dr. Ward, of course I'm glad I can speak French and that I've studied history and logic! Only . . .

DR. WARD. Yes, Mary?

MARY [*taking three quick steps toward him and speaking earnestly*]. Only it seems wrong, somehow, just to—[*Lifts her arms a little.*] suddenly stop. [*She drops her arms to her side.*]

DR. WARD [*puzzled*]. But school does stop. It stops for everyone.

MARY [*twisting her hands*]. Not for the boys. It *ends* for them. They sit on the platform and get a diploma with their names printed in gold.

DR. WARD. But, Mary, you wanted your education kept secret. Even in the worst winter weather, you were always there before breakfast just so people wouldn't suspect.

MARY. I know. Only now I want to finish with the others! [*The sparkle comes back into her. She crosses DR of sofa and leans hands on arm of sofa, speaking coaxingly.*] Dr. Ward, couldn't I sit on the platform today like the rest and get a diploma, too? Surprise them all!

DR. WARD [*kindly*]. Mary, dear, it would be a wonderful prank. [*Pauses.*] But is it wise?

MARY [*straightening, and speaking wistfully*]. I've got a new lemon-colored organdy—with ruffles—and a new bonnet with lemon ribbons—from London.

DR. WARD [*sorry to do it*]. You'd be charming, my child. Maybe there'll come a day when girls can enroll in college openly and graduate as a matter of course—but that day is far away

MARY [*head up, defiantly*]. I don't care what people say!

DR. WARD. But your parents care. Your father is a banker. It's important to him what people think—and people are always ready to criticize a stepmother.

MARY [*still rebellious*]. It just isn't fair!

DR. WARD. Perhaps not—but after all—the main thing is to go forward.

MARY [*puzzled*]. Go forward? How? Where does a woman start? I can't be a lawyer, a doctor, an architect——[*Sits by him.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage*]. Going, going, gone! [*Neither notices VOICE.*]

DR. WARD [*postively*]. A person starts where he is and does what he can. I wanted to be a great clergyman, but my health failed. . . . [*Takes her hands in his and speaks earnestly.*] Mary, sometimes I feel that, as your teacher, I may have accomplished something far, far more important than I would ever have done as a preacher.

MARY [*moved by his earnestness*]. But, sir, I'm only a school-girl. It isn't important to anyone but me whether I'm educated or not. Besides—

DR. WARD [*rising and stopping her with an upraised hand*]. You may have to create your place in the world—through a husband or a son. Don't despise this approach, if it is the only way open to you.

MARY [*musng*]. To create a place in the world—through a husband? [*For a moment she looks far into the future.*]

DR. WARD. I am an old man, and these are my last words as a

teacher: Mary, in the final accounting, your life will be profoundly rewarding. I am sure of it.

MARY [*rising and speaking warmly*]. Thank you, Dr. Ward—and I honestly don't mind a bit any more—about the diploma!

DR. WARD. That's the Mary Todd I admire! [*Rises.*] Well, then, I must hurry along or President Marshall will have closed the chapel doors. [*Moves to the archway, just as MR. TODD appears in doorway U L.*] Oh, good day, Mr. Todd! [*MR. TODD enters U L with an opened and an unopened letter in his hand. He crosses to shake hands with DR. WARD.*]

MR. TODD. Dr. Ward! I fancied you'd be at the exercises.

DR. WARD. I'm going there now. Shall I see you there?

MR. TODD. I may not manage it. I've had—er, disturbing news. [*Glances down at letters he holds.*]

DR. WARD [*going U R C*]. Then I'll bid you good day.

MR. TODD and MARY. Good day, Dr. Ward. . . . Mammy Sally! [*MAMMY SALLY enters from D R.*]

MR. TODD. Show Dr. Ward out, and Mammy, ask Mrs. Todd and Miss Ann to come here.

MAMMY SALLY. Yassuh. [*DR. WARD inclines his head, as does MR. TODD, who then crosses L C. MARY curtsies lightly. DR. WARD and MAMMY SALLY go out U R C. The door is heard to open and close, and then MAMMY SALLY is seen passing through hallway from R to L.*]

MARY [*starting to follow her father*]. Father, Dr. Ward just said something so wonderful that—

MR. TODD [*interrupting*]. Yes, yes, Mary, another time, please! [*MARY pauses at C. MR. TODD strides up and down the room from U L C to D L.*] I have a letter—[*Shows it.*—from Springfield. [*Pauses and wipes his brow with a large white handkerchief.*] I can hardly believe it . . . my own daughter!

MARY. Father! What's happened?

MR. TODD [*resuming his pacing*]. Dreadful! Incredible!

MARY [*dismayed, taking a step after him*]. Father—they're not—dead—are they? My sisters?

MR. TODD [*almost shouting*]. Did I say anyone was dead? [MRS. TODD and ANN enter hurriedly from U R C. ANN pauses at U. C.]

MRS. TODD [*going to MR. TODD, anxiously*]. Word of death? Oh, Robert, who is it?

MR. TODD [*at U L C, shouting*]. Don't panic! Women! I never saw anyone so emotional. Of course the girls aren't dead!

MRS. TODD [*sincerely, crossing to his other side*]. Thank heaven! [*A new anxiety.*] Is it something about the Stevens loan?

MR. TODD [*impatiently*]. Don't bring up the Stevens loan at a time like this! Stevens has the money. I don't have to worry about that, at least!

MARY. Father said something terrible has happened in Springfield.

MR. TODD. Yes, and it has! [*Shakes letter angrily.*] I have here a letter from your sister, Frances, calmly announcing that she's married!

MRS. TODD. Frances married! [*Takes a step backward and sinks into chair U L.*] But that's happy news!

MARY [*eagerly, taking a step toward him*]. Father! To whom?

ANN. How sly!

MR. TODD [*approvingly to ANN*]. Well, I'm glad there's *one* person in the family who sees what an affront was done me!

MRS. TODD. Affront, Robert?

MR. TODD. Can you ask? [*His voice rises again.*] My own daughter to marry without consulting me! Not even sending me an invitation to her wedding!

ANN [*quickly agreeing*]. After all you did for her, Father!

MARY. Ann—no! Frances probably thought if Elizabeth approved, you would also, Father.

MR. TODD. You think so?

MARY. I do. And if the man she married is Dr. Wallace, I'm sure you'd approve.

MR. TODD [*a bit mollified, scanning the letter*]. Yes, it's William Wallace, and I dare say he's a fine enough fellow. Still

—wouldn't you think Frances would *want* her own father at her wedding?

ANN. Frances was always selfish.

MRS. TODD [*rising and crossing to him*]. Robert, remember how young she is!

MARY [*beside him on the other side from her stepmother*].

And, Father, it's a three weeks' trip to Springfield and back, and she knows how busy you are. . . .

MR. TODD [*hemmed in and stepping toward D L C to break free, shouting again*]. I'm not too busy to attend my own daughter's wedding!

MARY [*following him and holding his arm*]. But, Father, it's all so different in Springfield. A young couple go together for a while and then if they decide to be married, they have the wedding that very day.

MR. TODD. They do? [MRS. TODD *takes his other arm*.]

MARY. They're very informal out there! Why, when I was visiting Elizabeth, two of the young men didn't even get their marriage licenses until they were on their way to the ceremony.

MRS. TODD. You see, Robert? Frances was just conforming—

MR. TODD. Sounds hasty and barbaric to me.

ANN [*crossing D R C, chiming in*]. So crude!

MR. TODD [*ignoring her*]. Still, if that's the custom of the frontier . . . [*Turns again to the letter*.] But she says they're taking rooms in a tavern. A tavern! What way is that to start married life?

MARY. Father, tavern doesn't mean a drinking place out there the way it does here. The Globe Tavern is a fine new hotel.

MRS. TODD. Let's rejoice in Frances' happiness and good fortune. [*Notices second letter in his hand*.] Did Elizabeth write also?

MR. TODD. Yes—it's to you, Mary. [*Hands her letter*.] See what she says.

MARY [*moving D C and opening letter*]. M'm, she says they're happy about the wedding. Dr. Wallace has a drug store as

well as his medical practice. . . . Mm, Frances wore a white satin gown. Elizabeth baked a five-layer wedding cake—mm—seems to be no news except about the wedding. [*Turns a page.*] She says I should come for a visit. [*Reads.*] “There is no lack of young company. Mercy Levering is here and Steve Douglas, Jimmy Shields and Josh Speed. There is also the ‘Rough Diamond’ as we call Abraham Lincoln, but he is not in our social set. Lincoln is amusing enough, but not the sort that would ever interest a Todd.” [*Turns a page, pauses and frowns.*] Why, how odd!

MRS. TODD. What is it, Mary?

MR. TODD. Read it out.

MARY. Just here at the last she says—[*Reads.*]—“So now that Frances is gone, Mary, dear, please visit us soon, as there is a vacancy in our household.” [*Glances up at them, troubled.*] What a strange word—“vacancy”—as though it were some kind of position to be filled!

ANN [*laughing harshly*]. Even Elizabeth thinks you can’t catch a husband!

MRS. TODD [*sharply*]. Ann—please! [*To MARY.*] Mary, dear, she only meant that feeling of emptiness we all have when a member of the household leaves.

ANN. Or she thinks out there where women are scarce you might catch the ineligible Mr. Abraham Lincoln!

MR. TODD [*curtly*]. Ann, that’s rude. Apologize at once!

ANN [*obeying, but merely parroting the words*]. Sister, please excuse my hasty words. I’m sorry.

MARY. Of course.

ANN. And now—[*Curtsies slightly to her PARENTS.*]—if you’ll excuse me. [*Goes out U R C.*]

MRS. TODD. I’ve things to attend to. [*Smiles.*] This good news has banished my headache. [*Turns to MARY.*] Mary, Sandy said he’ll stop by after the exercises.

MARY. Thank you, Mother. [*Moves L C.*]

MRS. TODD [*going D R*]. I think Sandy has something very special he wishes to discuss with you. [*Smiles at MARY.*] Very special. [*Goes out D R.*]

MR. TODD [*stepping to MARY's side at L C*]. You're not unhappy here, are you, Mary? You'll not run away . . . then send me word you're married to some total stranger?

MARY. No, I'm not unhappy.

MR. TODD [*putting his hand on her shoulder in a pleading gesture*]. Mother really loves you. You don't think of her as a— a stepmother—do you? She's worked so faithfully to raise you. . . .

MARY [*musings*]. Mother and I have a great deal in common. We both love French novels and plays . . .

MR. TODD [*dropping his hand*]. It was because of her encouragement you got college training.

MARY [*turning to face him*]. Yes, and she even let me decorate my own room—though I'm sure she thought the result was too ornate—and maybe it was! [*Smiles up at him.*]

MR. TODD [*smiling*]. Maybe it was!

MARY [*putting out both hands*]. But I just love fine feathers and big, handsome houses.

MR. TODD [*smiling and taking her hands in his*]. They're never too handsome or ornate for me!

MARY [*laughing*]. Or for me. [*For a moment they are two happy rebels; then both react as the VOICE of the auctioneer is heard.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage* . . . special value. Young man, exceptional character reference, make a good accountant . . .
[*VOICE fades out.*]

MARY. Father!

MR. TODD. I'm sorry, Mary. There's an auction of slaves today.

MARY. Oh, no! [*Faces downstage.*]

MR. TODD [*a bit impatient, but kind*]. Put it out of your mind, Mary. You can do nothing!

MARY. Father, why do people allow such things? Right here in Lexington! How can people do it . . . to other people?

MR. TODD. Because slaves are not considered people; they're bought and sold like any property. They can even be branded—like horses.

MARY [*turning to him*]. Can't you stop it, Father?

MR. TODD [*putting his arm around her*]. My darling, we're trying. Our American Colonization Society collects money to send free men of color back to Africa. I contribute more than I can really afford.

MARY [*drawing away*]. But it isn't the free ones that need help. [*Crosses to D R C.*] It's the ones like the Negro I saw that they whipped 'til his back was all blood. [*Turns back to face him.*] Why doesn't your society send *them* back to Africa?

MR. TODD [*crossing to chair L and sitting heavily, letting his hands fall at his side*]. Mary, these slaves are worth millions of dollars. We'd have to buy them from their owners. Where would we get the money? No one man can end slavery!

MARY. But, Father, we could somehow let them know we don't approve. . . .

MR. TODD. No, Mary, their owners would take that as a personal affront. You'll just have to forget it. [*Rises and changes subject.*] I didn't think Mother looked very well. I'll go to her.

MARY [*discouraged*]. Yes, Father.

MR. TODD [*starting to cross to door D R and pausing at D C*]. Was there something Dr. Ward said that you wanted to tell me?

MARY. Nothing that mattered, specially.

MR. TODD. Then I'll see you later, Mary. [*Goes out D R.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage, almost chanting*]. Going, going, gone!

Sold to the gentleman from South Car'lina. [*MARY listens a moment. She crosses toward the draped window, glancing back to be sure she is unobserved. Then she moves near the window to listen with tilted head. She puts up her hand as if to draw back the draperies, then puts her hands behind her and listens again. She reaches to pull the draperies again.*]

MAMMY SALLY enters from U R C. She is very much disturbed.]

MAMMY SALLY. Don' look, baby! Don' look!

MARY [*in an intense half whisper*]. Who is it?

MAMMY SALLY [*crossing to her side*]. Ain' no one we ever seen.

Mother, father, little boy, baby girl.

MARY. Are they selling them as a family?

MAMMY SALLY. No, Miss Mary, they ain't. And they're selling them down the river. The father just sold. He goin' to South Car'lina.

MARY. I must look. [*Starts to pull open draperies.*]

MAMMY SALLY [*troubled*]. Miss Mary, 'member what yo' Papa say!

MARY. I can't help it! I've got to see! [*Flings the draperies back and stands staring down. The auctioneer's VOICE is heard in chanting rhythm.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage*]. Going—going—a fine healthy ten-year-old. Grow up a strapping field hand! Two hundred dollars. Do I hear twenty-five? Going—going—gone. Sold for two hundred dollars to the gentleman from Natchez.

MARY. Mammy Sally!

MAMMY SALLY [*intensely*]. Pray for 'em, baby!

MARY. Listen!

AUCTIONEER [*offstage*]. Now, friends, I'm offering you a real bargain. A baby girl, eighteen months old, fat and healthy! [*Sharply.*] Hold her up high, gal. You ain't doin' your baby no favor clutching her like that so folks can't see she's sound. Bigger the price, the better looked after the kid will be. Now what am I offered? Any of you gentlemen got a slave with young children, just toss this one in with them. No trouble a-tall. Twenty-five dollars I'm offered by the gentleman from Alabama . . . thirty-five . . . thank you . . . [*The VOICE dies away somewhat as MARY lets the curtains fall and turns away. MAMMY SALLY puts an arm around her and supports her. Then the VOICE continues faintly.*]

AUCTIONEER [*offstage*]. Forty dollars. Gentlemen, here's an opportunity to pick up a real bargain. Got to have more'n forty dollars for this girl baby! Come on, now, gentlemen, do I

hear forty-five? [VOICE *fades down. The doorbell tinkles.*]
CASSIUS CLAY [offstage]. Thank you, Nelson, I'll just go in.

[CASSIUS CLAY *enters from U R C. He is erect, with a mane of white hair and an intense, aristocratic face and bearing. He crosses to MARY, who has stepped past MAMMY SALLY to greet him. She curtsies slightly as he bows.*]

CASSIUS CLAY. Mary, I saw you at the window.

MAMMY SALLY [*holding her hands out pleadingly*]. Come away, Miss Mary. Don' look no mo'.

CASSIUS CLAY [*shaking head, drawing MARY back to window*]. She must look!

MAMMY SALLY [*anxiously*]. Shall I fotch Miss Mary some tea, Mistah Cash? [*He nods. She goes out D R.*]

MARY. Cash, I'm so glad you're here. I felt as if I were going to faint.

AUCTIONEER'S VOICE [*heard strongly again*]. Going—going—gone! Sold to the gentleman from Alabama. Step up, gal. Now, gentlemen—[VOICE *begins to fade.*] I offer you this girl. Twenty-three years old, good cook, trained house servant . . . [*The voices fade but can be heard as a background to the following dialogue.*]

MARY. I can't bear it, Cash! [*Turns away.*] I can't bear it!

CASSIUS CLAY [*holding her there*]. No, wait and witness it all.

MARY. It's horrible!

CASSIUS CLAY. Yes, and you must see it, for then you'll never again be able to live a happy day without doing what you can to end this horror!

MARY. I—do something?

CASSIUS CLAY. Even a girl can do what her heart tells her! Listen, Mary—it's almost over.

AUCTIONEER [offstage]. Four hundred dollars. I thank the gentleman from Savannah. Four hundred dollars, four hundred. Do I hear five? Five hundred dollars. Thank you, sir. Will you go six? Will you go six? Five hundred dollars I'm offered. Going—going—gone to the gentleman from Georgia.

[MAMMY SALLY *enters from D R with tea tray holding tea service for two and a plate of cookies. She puts tray on table R C.*]

MAMMY SALLY. Here's tea—and I fotched your fav'rit cookies, Miss Mary.

MARY [*her voice hoarse*]. Cookies! [*Covers her eyes with her hand.*]

CASSIUS CLAY [*assisting MARY to chair by table*]. Sit here, Mary—your face is ghastly.

MAMMY SALLY [*pausing worried*]. Kin I fotch somethin' else?

CASSIUS CLAY [*standing upstage of table*]. She'll be all right, Mammy Sally. [MAMMY SALLY *goes out U R C.*]

MARY [*ignoring tea tray*]. They didn't even sell them into the same state. They'll never see each other again.

CASSIUS CLAY. Mary, will you give me some tea? I don't feel well.

MARY [*showing concern for him*]. Excuse me, Cash. [*Pours tea, hands him a cup.*] Cookies? [*Offers him some.*] These are especially good. [*Replaces plate of cookies on table. Her hand falls listlessly on chair arm.*]

CASSIUS CLAY [*waiting punctiliously*]. Will you join me, Mary?

MARY [*brought back to her duties as hostess*]. Of course. [*Pours a cup, sips it. Takes a cookie.*] Aunt Chaney's a wonderful cook. Have you ever tried her candied yams?

CASSIUS CLAY [*smiling, shaking his head*]. If they're as good as these cookies, I'd like to.

MARY [*cheered by the tea*]. Thank you, Cash. I know I should look at it all more reasonably.

CASSIUS CLAY. Reasonably?

MARY. Well, Grandma Humphreys liberated all her slaves in her will, and Father and Mother are going to do the same. Another cookie? [*Offers him plate. He declines. She takes another.*] After all, it would be cruel, in a way, to free our house servants. Where could they go?

CASSIUS CLAY [*coldly*]. They could go where they wish to.

MARY. But how would they live? [*Feeling his disapproval.*]

Oh, Cash, I know you think I'm unfeeling to sit here eating cookies when that poor family . . . [*Pauses, unable to continue.*]

CASSIUS CLAY. No, Mary. Your eating cookies doesn't harm them. What can harm them is your apology for slavery.

MARY [*sitting up straight and speaking with fire*]. I, an apologist for . . . why, Cassius Clay!

CASSIUS CLAY. You think you can temporize with evil, Mary. Just a half dozen house servants. Part of the family, really . . . but never free to go away. [*Puts down tea cup, leans toward her with both hands on the table and speaks slowly and emphatically.*] No, my dear, there are few absolutes in the world, but slavery is one of them: an absolute evil.

MARY. Father hopes slavery can be done away with—gradually, of course.

CASSIUS CLAY [*straightening up impatiently and speaking with emphasis*]. "Gradually" is too slow—tomorrow is too late! Why temporize with evil?

MARY [*repeating his words thoughtfully*]. Gradually is too slow—tomorrow is too late—I'll remember that. But truly, Cash, Father does what he can!

CASSIUS CLAY. Yes—he tries. But with an absolute evil, any man who compromises is lost. [*Drinks his tea thoughtfully, then puts it down again.*] I'm sorry to say this, Mary, but your father will sooner or later be caught in a situation where he will be forced to do something fully as horrible as the thing you just witnessed.

MARY [*rising and speaking passionately*]. Not Father. Never! Never! [*The doorbell tinkles and MAMMY SALLY passes in hallway from L to R to answer ring.*]

[*MAMMY SALLY enters from U R C.*]

MAMMY SALLY. Miss Mary, Mistah Sandy waitin' to see you.

MARY. Show him in. [*MAMMY SALLY goes out U R C and R.*]

CASSIUS CLAY. I'll say good-bye. [*They shake hands. MARY leaves her hand in his.*]

MARY. No, Cash. [*Smiles up at him.*] You know you've been my hero ever since I was twelve, and Sandy will like to see you. Do stay.

CASSIUS CLAY [*smiling*]. Excuse me, if I venture to doubt that! [*SANDY enters U R C. MAMMY SALLY can be seen crossing hall from R to L.*] Ah, McDonald! Commencement over? Allow me to congratulate you—[*They shake hands.*—and wish you good day!

SANDY. 'Thank you, Sir.

CASSIUS CLAY. Miss Mary—[*Bows and goes out U R C.*]

SANDY. Mary—[*Bows. She curtsies.*]

MARY. My congratulations, too, Sandy.

SANDY [*stepping closer*]. You're wearing the flowers! Did they help a little, Mary?

MARY. Help? I don't know what you mean!

SANDY. I thought of you every minute we were on the platform. Did you mind much?

MARY [*uneasily*]. Mind? Mind what?

SANDY. Not getting a diploma. Not being at the exercises with the others.

MARY. Sandy, you knew! [*Crosses to L C.*] I thought no one at school even suspected.

SANDY. I knew all along. [*Follows her L C.*]

MARY. But how? I never said a word! [*Turns to face him.*] Does everybody else in town know, too?

SANDY. I don't think so. It was an accident I ever found out.

MARY. How did you?

SANDY [*laughing*]. Well, I'd like to pretend intuition; but right at the start of college when I was talking about my classes, you said something that made me realize you knew the assignment. Once I suspected, it wasn't hard to guess.

MARY. Oh, dear. I thought I was being so clever!

SANDY. Forget it! By the way, Mary, I hope it isn't inopportune for me to be here today?

MARY. Of course not. Why should you think that?

SANDY. I met your father hurrying away as I came in. He seemed upset.

MARY [*worried*]. He was feeling bad earlier, but that was because my sister married without consulting him. It couldn't be that still. . . .

SANDY. No, he said it was business. He had to go to a meeting of the Board of Directors of the bank.

MARY. He told you that?

SANDY. Yes. I—uh, mentioned that I wanted to speak to him. He was quite hurried. A Mr. Stevens has suddenly died.

MARY. Mr. Stevens! How sad! He and Father are great friends.

SANDY. I don't believe I ever met him.

MARY. He's a hemp manufacturer. The bank made him a big loan recently.

SANDY. Well, I'm sorry I mentioned it. This news has made you unhappy.

MARY. Not really, Sandy. [*Crosses to sofa R and sits*] I don't even know Mr. Stevens well, though I used to play with his daughter, Grace, and her slave, Tamar [*Smiles up at him.*] Tamar was so pretty and intelligent. Come, sit down. Shall you be here much longer?

SANDY [*sitting upstage of her*]. Not long.

MARY. There are always parties after school closes.

SANDY. I'd like to wait a while, but I'm the only son and since Father died at Easter, I'm needed at Fairview.

MARY. Fairview—that's a lovely name.

SANDY. It's called that because you can see a big silvery curve of the Mississippi down through the green of the live oaks [*Pauses and takes her hand.*] I'll need help in managing the place, Mary.

MARY [*evasively*]. I expect your Mother has plans. . . .

SANDY. No, Mother doesn't like the place with Father gone. She wants to travel . . . visit new places.

MARY. Tell me about your home, Sandy. You've never really described it.

SANDY [*leaning forward, hands loosely clasped*]. I don't know if I can make you see it. There's the big white house with live oak trees around it and moss hanging from the branches. There are Doric columns around three sides of the house, and the ceilings are eighteen feet high. The furniture is good, but the rooms need redecorating—we'll easily manage that. The plantation's been profitable. I think you'd have fun redecorating the house, Mary.

MARY [*protesting*]. But, Sandy—

SANDY. Crops are up to the master, but everything else revolves about the mistress of the house. The happiness of the family and the slaves as well.

MARY [*frowning a little*]. Do you have many slaves?

SANDY. About two hundred, more or less. [*Smiles.*] We never can keep track of all the pickaninnies. They're all over the slave quarters like puppies. Of course, we lose some of them when the work is heavy.

MARY. You don't have babies working!

SANDY. Certainly not! But when the crops are ripe, every able-bodied slave has to be in the fields from dawn until dark.

MARY. The mothers, too?

SANDY. Of course.

MARY. Then who looks after the babies?

SANDY. Well, there's old Aunt Hitty. She's lame and can be spared. She takes care of them. [*Outside there is the sound of slave VOICES singing a Negro spiritual. They continue softly singing, making a background for the following speeches.*]

MARY [*turning towards window*]. What is that singing?

SANDY. Just slaves waiting to be sold, I imagine. Some of them have quite good voices. [*Listens a moment.*] Well, as I was saying, we don't lose too many of the pickaninnies, and, after all, it does weed out the weaklings.

MARY [*shivers a little*]. I see.

SANDY [*anxiously*]. I hope I don't sound unfeeling, Mary. Mother makes every one of them a little white shroud to be

buried in, and I've seen her weep when she comes from comforting the mothers. She does a lot for them—gives them medicine when they're sick, teaches them to read.

MARY [*impressed*]. She educates them?

SANDY. There isn't a slave on the place that can't write his name and spell out a few words in the Bible. [*Proudly.*] They have Mother to thank for that!

MARY [*for the first time, she's caught a bit*]. It might be fun to educate them. I mean—like we were taught, Sandy!

SANDY [*doubtful*]. Well . . . they work pretty late and then they've cooking to do, and of course there's no light in the cabins to study by. [*Smiles.*] I'm afraid your students would fall asleep. Remember they're in the fields as soon as it's light enough to see.

MARY. But the children . . . a person could *really* educate them.

SANDY [*conceding a point*]. Well—a few. It's worthwhile training a butler and a housekeeper and an accountant but I'm afraid you'd be criticized if you started raising slaves above their rightful station.

MARY [*rising and speaking slowly*]. I understand, Sandy, and I think I know why your mother wants to travel to new places. Life on a southern plantation would not suit me. [*Crosses to U C.*]

SANDY [*rising, dismayed*]. But I was hoping we could be married this week. I wanted to take you home to Fairview with me!

MARY. I'm sorry, Sandy.

SANDY [*crossing to her side*]. Perhaps you can't bear to leave Lexington—it's so beautiful here.

MARY. No, Sandy, I could leave Lexington if there were a force strong enough to draw me elsewhere.

SANDY. And I am not that force?

MARY [*perceiving his hurt and lightly kissing his cheek*]. We've been good friends. But, Sandy, mustn't love be more than that?

[MAMMY SALLY *enters from U R C. She is troubled and apologetic.*]

MAMMY SALLY [*speaking from archway*]. 'Scuse me, Miss Mary.

MARY [*surprised*]. What is it?

MAMMY SALLY. Tamar here. She in powerful trouble.

MARY. Tamar is! Why, what's the matter?

MAMMY SALLY. She crope up the back stairs to my room. She beggin' and prayin' you'll talk to her.

SANDY [*puzzled*]. Tamar who?

MARY [*absently*]. Mr. Stevens' slave. I used to play with her. Bring her in, Mammy.

SANDY [*urgently*]. Wait, Mammy. Mary, don't see her now.

You can't interrupt a talk like this just to listen to a slave.

MARY. I'm afraid I must, Sandy. I'm very fond of Tamar. To me, she isn't a slave at all. She's an old playmate. [*To MAMMY.*] Bring her in.

MAMMY SALLY. Thank you, Miss Mary. [*Goes out U R C.*]

SANDY. But, Mary—

MARY [*holding out her hand in farewell*]. Shall we say good-bye, Sandy? [*Smiles mischievously.*] This shows I'd never make a proper plantation lady! [*Steps D L C, flaring a bit.*] And furthermore, I wouldn't weep with the mothers over the dead babies or sit around making little white shrouds for them! I'd keep all the slave mothers home and have them take *specialy good care* of the sickly babies! So now you know, Mr. Sandy McDonald.

SANDY [*indignantly*]. That's the most unfair statement I ever heard a girl make!

MARY [*angrily*]. Well, I don't think much of you, either. [*Imitates his voice.*] "After all, it does weed out the weaklings." That's a fine, Christian attitude!

SANDY. You're a great one to talk Christianity! I don't mind your saying things against me. But when you criticize Mother! She's so tender-hearted and kind to everyone!

[TAMAR *enters and stands hesitantly in the archway. She is a beautiful, slender Negro girl.*]

TAMAR [*hesitantly*]. Miss Mary—

MARY. Come in, Tamar. [*To SANDY.*] Let's be friends, Sandy. I apologize for criticizing your mother. I'm sure she tries to do her best. Good-bye, Sandy, and good luck.

SANDY [*stands defiantly a moment, looking at her. Then his defense melts. He steps forward, clasps her in his arms a moment.*] Good-bye, Mary. [*Leaves swiftly U R C, brushing past TAMAR, oblivious to her existence.*]

MARY [*looking after him a moment, shaking her head, then crossing to TAMAR U C of archway*]. Mammy Sally said something has happened. Is it your husband—or the baby? They're not sick, are they?

TAMAR. No, they well, Miss Mary.

MARY. But something's happened. I can see it in your eyes.

TAMAR. Miss Mary—[*She can't go on. She takes a half step toward MARY.*]

MARY [*kindly*]. Yes, Tamar?

TAMAR [*hand to the base of her throat as if it's hard to get the words out*]. They're fixin' to sell us.

MARY [*horrified*]. Sell you! No, Tamar! Mr. Stevens wasn't like that! Wait until his will is read. I'm sure you'll find you and Jake and Chloe are freed.

TAMAR. Don't make no difference what the will say. Mr. Stevens bankrupt! [*Crosses swiftly to MARY, drops to one knee and takes her hand pleadingly.*] Miss Mary, you always yo' papa's favorite. Coax him, beg him to sell us as a family! Don't let them send us down the river!

MARY. Sell you off separately? My father! Tamar, you're out of your mind! Father would never, never do a thing like that!

TAMAR. He president of the bank.

MARY. Get up this minute! [*Draws TAMAR to her feet.*] You've listened to some foolish gossip and you're all upset. It won't happen!

TAMAR [*hopefully*]. Truly, Miss Mary?

MARY. I'm sure of it. But I'll talk to Father.

TAMAR [*taking MARY's hand and touching it to her forehead*].

I'll bless you with my dying breath.

MARY [*touched, but speaking lightly*]. Nonsense. You better be hurrying back to baby Chloe. How is she? [*A door closes offstage* D R.]

TAMAR [*flashing a grateful smile*]. She teethin'.

MARY. Then you better go along and take care of her. If that's Father, I'll talk to him.

TAMAR [*going*]. Mammy Sally bring me word, soon as you sure.

MARY. All right, Tamar. I'll send her. [TAMAR goes out U R C and L rather than by the front door. MARY looks after her a moment, shakes her head, then goes D R and calls offstage.]
Father, is that you?

MR. TODD [*offstage* D R]. Yes, Mary.

[MR. TODD enters D R, coming into room a step or so.]

MARY. Come in, Father. I know it's silly to bother you about this, but Tamar was just here.

MR. TODD [*puzzled*]. Tamar?

MARY. Mr. Stevens' slave. She used to play with me and Grace Stevens when we were children.

MR. TODD [*unhappily, tightening his lips*]. I'd forgotten her.
[Crosses D L C.]

MARY [*smiling, following him a step or so*]. Father, Tamar's heard some wild rumor the bank's going to sell Mr. Stevens' Negroes on the block.

MR. TODD [*his back to her*]. We must, Mary.

MARY [*frozen in her tracks*]. You mean—it's true!

MR. TODD [*turning to half face her*]. Mary, you don't understand. Stevens was in to the hilt at the bank and I approved the loan. I knew there was a risk, but I checked everything. . . . [*Faces her.*] Stevens would have pulled out of it with a huge profit—if he hadn't suddenly died.

MARY [*bewildered, stepping toward him, pleading*]. But you've always been against that method. You said it was inhuman—

MR. TODD [*wringing his hands and facing D L C again*]. We

must get the last possible dollar out of the slaves. It's our only chance to cut our losses.

MARY [*pleading desperately*]. Father, insist that the families be sold together. . . . Don't let the traders buy them to ship down the river!

MR. TODD [*turning D L*]. That would cut their value in half! [*MARY covers her eyes with her hands and slumps against table.*] Mary, don't! If it were only my money, perhaps I could . . . but it's other people's money—the depositors, the other board members. [*Sinks down heavily in chair D L, his face in his hands.*]

MARY [*crossing swiftly and kneeling by him, puts her arm about his shoulder.*] Darling Father, there must be some other way.

[*MRS. TODD appears in doorway D R. She starts to enter and then pauses unnoticed in the doorway, listening.*]

MR. TODD [*looking at MARY and shaking his head sadly*]. No, Mary, I'm caught. Stevens' Negroes will have to be sold to the highest bidder like his other property. It's a part of our business structure, and as long as I'm president of the bank——

MARY [*springing to her feet, stepping back and speaking sharply*]. Isn't that too high a price to pay for the presidency?

MR. TODD [*rising also and speaking in a tone of controlled anger*]. Mary, stop acting like a child! Grow up and face reality! [*His voice begins to rise.*] I didn't introduce slavery—I've worked to get it abolished——

MARY [*interrupting*]. It's as Cash says, "Gradually is too slow." You're temporizing with an absolute evil.

MR. TODD [*interrupting more loudly*]. I didn't kill Stevens, I just loaned him a lot of depositors' money. And I'm going to live up to my responsibilities, whether I enjoy it or not!

MARY [*crossing U L and sinking trembling into chair U L*]. I'm ashamed, Father! [*Hides her face.*]

[*MRS. TODD enters D R and sweeps across the room.*]

MRS. TODD [*furiously*]. How dare you condemn your father! By what right do you sit there and pass judgment? What entitles you to this holier-than-thou attitude?

MR. TODD [*crossing C*]. Betsy, please!

MRS. TODD. No, Robert, don't interfere. I'm not going to let this girl make life more miserable for you than it must be [*Seizes MARY's arm and forces her to stand.*] You ought to be ashamed of yourself, adding to your father's troubles! [*Shakes her.*] Don't you think he has enough to worry about without your schoolgirl moralizing?

MARY. Mother! Don't! [*Tries to pull her arm away.*]

MRS. TODD. Are you the head of this household? Do you do the work, or take the responsibilities? [*Shakes her.*] No. You just interfere when something happens that you don't like!

MR. TODD. Betsy!

MRS. TODD [*not heeding*]. Well, we don't like it, either. We don't like Stevens' dying, not all the worry and loss. But we don't reproach each other for what has to be done. We—we help each other— —[*Releases MARY's arm and turns to her husband. He puts an arm around her, and she hides her face on his shoulder.*]

MR. TODD. Betsy, don't upset yourself! You're not well!

MARY [*crossing to MRS. TODD, speaking hoarsely*]. Mother, you're quite right. [*Puts her hand on MRS. TODD's shoulder for a moment.*] I see now that Father's doing the best he can. . . . Forgive me, Father . . . Mother!

MR. TODD [*patting the hand MARY has put on MRS. TODD's shoulder*]. Of course we do, darling.

MARY. It's true I need to finish growing-up—and somehow, I want to do it in a free state. I think I'll accept Elizabeth's invitation to visit her in Springfield—it that's all right.

MR. TODD. Not another daughter to Springfield!

MRS. TODD. Robert—it's just a visit.

MR. TODD. Well—for a short visit, then. . . .

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

SCENE: *The drawing room of Elizabeth and Ninian Edwards in Springfield is essentially the same as the Todd drawing room in Act One, but all accessories are different and gayer in tone. Lace curtains replace the heavy draperies of Act One. Greens, rather than flowers, are used for decoration. If the same lamps are used, the shades are different. All the lamps are lit except for one on the table D L. A bell strap or cord is on the wall U C.*]

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is New Year's Eve. ELIZABETH expects casual callers in the early evening, and she has planned a buffet dinner for an invited group of friends to see the New Year in. The dinner is to be served in a room off stage. MARY enters from U L, bringing in a dish of oranges, a few with the skin cut and turned back for easy peeling and eating. She places them on the table U R, stands off to view the effect and rearranges them a trifle. ELIZABETH enters from U L with dishes of bonbons, which she places on tables U C and L. She has a gaily beribboned basket on her arm.*]

MARY [*turning to watch*]. What a pretty card basket!

ELIZABETH. We may not need it, really, unless you and I both go out. [*Puts basket on table behind couch.*] I thought I'd have it ready, just in case.

MARY [*crossing to upstage end of couch*]. It certainly will dress up the front door.

ELIZABETH. Saves people ringing and being turned away when no one's home to receive them. [*Crosses to table U R and rearranges the oranges.*]

MARY [*commenting, as her sister works*]. It could prevent interruptions, too—if a person wanted not to be disturbed.

ELIZABETH [*absently*]. I suppose so. [*To herself as she stands irresolutely in front of archway.*] I'm forgetting something.

MARY. Is it something for the buffet dinner? Can I help?

ELIZABETH. No, Bertha has that in hand. You don't need to do a thing. [*To herself, in sudden recollection.*] The soft-shell almonds! [*Goes out U L. MARY hums a gay tune lightly to herself, crosses to the unlighted lamp, lights it, adjusts it. She isn't quite satisfied with it.*]

[*ELIZABETH re-enters with dishes of almonds, which she places on table U R.*]

MARY. There! [*She is satisfied now and picks up lamp to place it on table in front of window.*]

ELIZABETH [*turning to face MARY*]. Mary—don't put the lamp in the window yet!

MARY [*pausing, impatiently*]. But I like this Springfield custom: Put a lamp in the window to let gentlemen know when you're ready to receive them.

ELIZABETH [*crossing to C*]. You can put it there later. I want to talk with you.

MARY. Oh, Sis, another time! Mercy's coming over and we expect callers. [*Places lamp.*]

ELIZABETH. Later, I said! [*Crosses swiftly and picks up lamp as MARY puts it down. Their glances lock, then ELIZABETH goes back to the table L with the lamp. MARY hesitates, tosses her head, then walks to C and faces her sister.*]

MARY. I don't see why we have to talk now. Can't it wait?

ELIZABETH [*from behind couch*]. I may have waited longer than I should have, already. This is no pleasure to me, I assure you. Let's sit down. [*ELIZABETH goes to chair U C.*]

MARY [*sitting on the downstage end of sofa*]. Well, come to the point.

ELIZABETH. I'm certain it's just youth and thoughtlessness, Mary. That's what I told Ninian last night.

MARY [*concerned*]. Ninian! Is he displeased, too?

ELIZABETH. It isn't that he's *displeased*. [*In a rush.*] Oh, Mary, we don't say much about it, but you know how deeply Ninian hopes to be governor—like his father! We just have to be careful!

MARY [*incredulously*]. You mean something I've done could hurt Ninian's *political chances*?

ELIZABETH. You're his sister-in-law. Part of his family.

MARY. But what have I done?

ELIZABETH. Well, it isn't exactly any *one thing*.

MARY [*puzzled*]. Was it that time I rode home in the dray because the streets were so terribly muddy and there aren't any sidewalks?

ELIZABETH [*impatiently*]. Oh, Mary, don't be silly! That was six months ago. Everybody thought that was amusing. All the young men were intrigued.

MARY [*thoughtfully*]. Six months! I hadn't realized I'd been here that long.

ELIZABETH. Well, you came in June and today's the last of December. Mary, it isn't that Ninian and I are fussy—we just laughed off that first criticism.

MARY. The first criticism—what was that?

ELIZABETH. Jealous mamas mostly finding fault because you outshone their own darlings with the gentlemen.

MARY [*hurt but composed*]. I never even suspected. What did they say?

ELIZABETH. Oh, a lot of nonsense. [*Imitates a too, too sweet voice attacking.*] "Isn't it a trifle unwomanly of dear Mary to be so interested in politics and slavery? Will Mary ever concern herself with matters proper to her sex?"

MARY [*shifting on the sofa so she faces ELIZABETH more directly, inwardly seething, but composed*]. Such as what?

ELIZABETH. I asked that, too . . . "trimming a bonnet," they said, or "choosing a roast."

MARY. I thought I left all that behind in Lexington! Liz, you

said six months. . . . Are you trying to tell me I've stayed too long?

ELIZABETH [*rising and crossing to sit on sofa beside MARY*].

My own sister? Don't be silly. Ninian and I hope you'll stay with us 'til you go to a home of your own.

MARY [*perked up again*]. A home of my own? I've picked out the very one I want. [*Clasps her hands dreamily*.] The Houghan house!

ELIZABETH [*amused*]. The Houghan house! You've certainly chosen an elegant residence. [*Smiles approvingly*.] Evidently you expect to marry a man of substance.

MARY. Not necessarily. I might buy it with the money Mother left me. [*Dreamily*.] The Houghan house would make a marvelous background for a man in politics.

ELIZABETH. I hope you're thinking of Mr. Stephen Douglas.

MARY. Possibly. . . . But I have other friends who are in politics. [*Rises and moves to table U R.*]

ELIZABETH [*her voice sharpening*]. Such as whom?

MARY [*smiling to herself and speaking with unconscious pride, as she turns to face ELIZABETH*]. Such as Mr. Abraham Lincoln! Are you through, Liz? May I put the lamp in the window?

ELIZABETH [*more sharply than she has yet spoken*]. I certainly am not through. It's about Mr. Lincoln I want to speak to you.

MARY [*defensive and cool*]. What about Mr. Lincoln?

ELIZABETH. You're seeing far too much of him. He's not suitable company for you.

MARY [*taken aback*]. He's not? But he's cousin John's law partner.

ELIZABETH [*relieved, turns as if to walk back to sofa*]. There! I knew it! I told Ninian you were just being polite.

MARY [*following her*]. You talk that way because you don't know Mr. Lincoln.

ELIZABETH. Of course I don't know him—he's not socially acceptable. [*Stops at couch and turns to face MARY*.]

MARY. Oh, Liz, don't be unfair. He's socially *inexperienced*, that's all—I coach him a bit when I get the chance. . . . He's interesting and he has a wonderful sense of humor.

ELIZABETH. Backwoods jokes!

MARY [*at C*]. No. . . . I mean he can laugh at himself. [*Glowing.*] At the cotillion he said to me, "Miss Todd, I want to dance with you *the worst way!*" and we danced, and he stepped all over my feet and bumped into other couples! [*Laughs happily.*] And at the last I said, "Mr. Lincoln, you certainly got your wish!" He just laughed.

ELIZABETH [*unsympathetically*]. All I noticed about him was that he made you look ridiculous, waving his arms like a Dutch windmill—and the awkward way he sits with his hands almost touching the floor! And that high, nasal voice!

MARY. If he's so bad, why does cousin John keep him for a law partner?

ELIZABETH. He's not a complete fool. He knows law and he has a sort of cracker barrel wit that appeals to local juries. But I tell you plainly, Mary, it undermines the prestige of the Edwards family when you associate with riff-raff.

MARY [*flaring up*]. It's time I went back to Lexington! [*Crosses to D R.*]

ELIZABETH [*more kindly, following her a few steps*]. Don't be so touchy. It's just that we hate to see you missing chances that may not come again.

MARY [*sullenly, glaring off D R*]. What chances?

ELIZABETH [*more emphatically*]. The chance to make a brilliant marriage.

MARY. To whom, for instance?

ELIZABETH. To Mr. Stephen Douglas, for instance!

MARY. He hasn't asked me.

ELIZABETH. He would if he got a penny's worth of encouragement.

[NINIAN enters. He crosses to ELIZABETH, touches her cheek affectionately, and pauses between ELIZABETH and MARY at R C.]

NINIAN [*a trifle pompously*]. You two seem deep in serious problems—a new gown?

ELIZABETH. We were discussing Stephen Douglas. What do you think of him as a politician?

NINIAN. I don't like to admit it of a Democrat—but he'll go far—perhaps as far as the Presidency.

MARY [*impressed, turning to face NINIAN*]. Actually—the Presidency?

NINIAN [*sitting*]. He's got a brilliant mind and an instinct for leadership. He's already head of his party here in Illinois.

ELIZABETH. And as a person? [*Lifts her eyebrows meaningly and slightly indicates MARY.*]

NINIAN. Charm and dynamic force . . . don't *you* like him, Mary?

MARY. Everybody likes Mr. Douglas. I'm no exception.

NINIAN [*taking newspaper from his pocket*]. He's a great catch for any girl.

MARY [*uninterested*]. I suppose so.

ELIZABETH. You know the old saying: "Go through the woods looking and finally choose a crooked stick." [*With cutting sarcasm.*] A crooked stick like Mr. Abraham Lincoln!

MARY [*flaring up*]. Wait 'til he comes tonight! You'll see how at ease he is! How witty and intelligent! [*Strides across to U L C.*]

NINIAN. Good lord! The girl talks as if she were in love with the fellow!

ELIZABETH. In love with him! She couldn't be! [*Both look tensely at MARY.*]

MARY [*stunned with the first clear realization*]. In love with him? . . . [*Musingly.*] Perhaps I am.

ELIZABETH [*crossing to MARY, grasping her arm and giving her an impatient shake*]. You must be out of your mind! You don't even know what love is!

MARY [*dreamily, scarcely heeding ELIZABETH*]. Not know what love is? [*With happy certainty.*] Oh—but I do! And now, Liz, may I put the lamp in the window?

ELIZABETH. Never! Why, he's the last man in the world for you!

MARY [*warmly and without constraint*]. Not the last, Liz, the first—first and only.

ELIZABETH. But when could this have happened?

MARY [*dreamily*]. I guess it really happened the first time I saw him.

NINIAN [*jerking his paper into long folds*]. Love at first sight, eh? I pity you when you come to your senses, my girl!

MARY [*with spirit*]. You can't deny his ability!

NINIAN [*beginning to pace from D R to D L C*]. I don't need to deny or affirm anything about him! I simply say I don't want Abraham Lincoln in my family! [*Strikes couch arm hard with folded paper as he passes it.*]

MARY [*going to him at D R C and putting her hand on his arm*]. Forgive me, Ninian. You know I respect your judgment. Why, then, do you accept Mr. Lincoln as leader of your party?

NINIAN [*slamming the paper angrily against his leg*]. He's a good state-level politician, but he'll never go beyond that.

MARY. He can go as far as any man—farther than most.

ELIZABETH [*moving to just D R of MARY*]. Why should you be drawn to the man who has the least to offer you?

MARY [*with spirit*]. Because, for one thing, he is the one to whom I have the most to give.

NINIAN. He's in debt to his ears!

MARY. He's told me all about that. When his store failed, of course he felt responsible for his partner's debts. [*With a little laugh.*] He calls it the national debt! [*Coolly.*] Do you blame him, Ninian, for assuming a moral debt that he couldn't legally have been forced to pay?

NINIAN [*conceding it, and walking away from her to chair U L*]. Oh, the fellow's honest enough—leans over backwards—but he's a hypochondriac.

MARY. Hypochondriac. What's that?

NINIAN. He mopes—thinks nothing of taking two or three days off just to sulk—says he “has the hypo.” [*Sits down.*]

MARY. You mean he’s sometimes melancholy. I’ve known about that. [*Cheerfully.*] It’ll be different when he has a wife!

ELIZABETH [*dismayed*]. A wife! Mary, are you engaged to Mr. Lincoln?

MARY [*faltering*]. Engaged to him? No—no, I’m not.

ELIZABETH [*pressing her advantage*]. Has he ever told you he loves you?

MARY [*lowering her head and speaking uncertainly*]. No—he hasn’t. He’s unsure—I——[*Turns away.*]

ELIZABETH [*inflexibly*]. Then how can you presume so much?

MARY But we’ve gone for walks—he talks to me about all his problems—I—I couldn’t feel so much for him and he feel nothing! [*Appeals to them.*] Could I?

ELIZABETH. That’s for you to discover for yourself, Mary.

MARY [*with spirit again*] And I intend to. And now—if you’ll allow me—[*As ELIZABETH and NINIAN watch motionless, MARY takes the lamp and places it in window.*]

NINIAN [*to ELIZABETH*]. You intend to allow her to go on seeing him?

ELIZABETH. It’s just a girl’s romantic fancy. The better she knows him, the less likely she is to remain in love. [*Bell rings.*] Callers.

MARY [*with an effort*]. Probably Mercy.

[NOTE: ALLIE may appear in archway, or announce the guests from offstage. The GUESTS (and ALLIE) come from the archway U R C and R.]

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Miss Mercy Levering. [NINIAN rises and puts his paper down on table.]

[MERCY enters U R C.]

MERCY [*curtsying prettily and speaking gushingly*]. Good evening, Mrs. Edwards, Mr. Edwards, Mary. I hope I’m not too terribly early! [NINIAN returns a short bow.]

ELIZABETH [*crossing to archway to greet MERCY*]. Good evening, Mercy. You're welcome at any time.

NINIAN [*advancing to C*]. You're looking very pretty! Is that a new gown?

MERCY. Oh, Mr. Edwards, you're *too* kind! I've had this simply *ages*!

MARY. Won't you sit down, Mercy? I see you brought your needlepoint. [*MERCY crosses to center of couch and sits. MARY sits upstage of her.*]

MERCY [*taking a small square of needlepoint out of a fancy work bag*]. I'm *so* anxious to finish it. [*Coyly to NINIAN.*] We Baltimore girls have a *silly* little custom. We fill a *hope chest*.

NINIAN [*intrigued*]. A hope chest? What is that?

MERCY [*in mock confusion*]. Oh, Mr. Edwards, I *couldn't* explain. I'd just die.

NINIAN [*wondering if he's been indelicate*]. Excuse my asking, Miss Levering.

ELIZABETH [*dryly*]. A hope chest contains household linens and lingerie to be used after marriage.

NINIAN [*relieved*]. An excellent idea. [*To ELIZABETH.*] Perhaps we should leave the girls. Doubtless they have important private matters to discuss.

ELIZABETH. Doubtless they have . . . and we should really drop in on the Jaynes' at-home.

NINIAN. Must we?

ELIZABETH. We won't stay.

NINIAN [*reluctantly*]. But our buffet dinner?

ELIZABETH. Those guests won't be along until much later. Mary and Mercy can receive any New Year's callers.

MERCY. I'm afraid I promised Julia Jayne I'd drop in a while.

MARY. I said I *might* come.

ELIZABETH. Well, if you both go out, be sure to hang the card basket on the door. [*Bell rings. ALL glance toward door.*]

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Mistah Conkling—[*With unconscious added emphasis.*—and Mistah Stephen Douglas.

[CONKLING enters, a quiet, retiring, handsome young man. DOUGLAS is quite short, but his vitality and exuberance completely dominate the group until the entrance of LINCOLN.]

ELIZABETH [*shaking hands with warm hospitality*]. Mr. Conkling. [CONKLING murmurs a response and moves on. ELIZABETH curtsies and speaks with unconscious added deference.] Mr. Douglas! So glad you dropped in.

DOUGLAS [*bowing*]. Good evening, Mrs. Edwards. As always, you look charming!

NINIAN [*stepping to C and shaking hands*]. Conkling, good evening. [CONKLING moves on, greeting MARY and then, lingeringly, MERCY. He stands at D L C.]

NINIAN [*greets DOUGLAS*]. Ah—the steam engine in britches! [*Shakes hands.*] Thought you were in Chicago.

DOUGLAS [*stopping at L C between NINIAN and MARY*]. Just got back today, sir.

MARY [*curtsying*]. How was the city?

DOUGLAS [*bowing deeply, with a flattering glance*]. Not nearly so interesting as Springfield.

MARY. I'm sure among all those beautiful Chicago ladies you never gave us a thought!

DOUGLAS. I'll prove otherwise. [*Takes a small parcel from his pocket.*] A trifle.

MARY [*opening it*]. You're too thoughtful. [*Takes out a thimble.*] A Dresden thimble! [*The others take a step or so closer.*] How charming!

MERCY. How utterly sweet!

ELIZABETH. Try it on, Mary. [*MARY puts it on, takes MERCY's needlepoint and pantomimes sewing with exaggerated movements to display the thimble.*]

MARY [*glancing meaningfully at ELIZABETH*]. Mr. Douglas, at least, doesn't think me unwomanly, since he gives me a thimble.

DOUGLAS [*with warmth*]. Unwomanly? You? On the contrary!

[NINIAN and ELIZABETH smile and nod to each other approvingly.]

MARY. You're coming to our buffet dinner tonight?

DOUGLAS. I returned today just to be on hand for it.

MERCY [*smiling*]. My needlework, please.

MARY [*returning it to MERCY, who then walks D L C, followed by CONKLING*]. I must find needlework of my own to display my new thimble.

CONKLING [*to MERCY, examining the needlework*]. How much you've accomplished!

MERCY. Oh, not much, really——

CONKLING [*earnestly*]. But this yellow flower is completely filled in. You only started the other day.

MERCY. I try to be diligent.

CONKLING. Your fingers must be worn to the bone. [*Takes her hand and tenderly examines it. They converse in pantomime. Doorbell rings. MARY takes a few steps toward entrance.*]

ELIZABETH. Allie will answer it.

NINIAN. It may be a message for me. [*All look expectantly toward entrance.*]

ALLIE [*clearly*]. Mistah Abraham Lincoln.

[LINCOLN appears from U R C. After entering the room, he stands hesitant at R C. He is tense, and all dimly sense his latent power.]

MARY [*warmly*]. Mr. Lincoln——[*Curtisies.*]

NINIAN [*snubbing him in surprised tone*]. Mr. Lincoln! Did you bring me a message from John?

LINCOLN [*embarrassed, not sure whether to bow or answer*]. No—I—uh—haven't seen John.

NINIAN [*seemingly puzzled*]. If you wish to see me on business, perhaps tomorrow . . . [LINCOLN stands uncertainly.]

MARY [*coming forward firmly, hand outstretched*]. Forgive me, Ninian, but I can't let you appropriate Mr. Lincoln. He is *my* guest. [*Takes his arm warmly and then guides him forward to her sister.*] Elizabeth, may I present Mr. Lincoln?

ELIZABETH [*coldly and formally*]. Delighted, Mr. Lincoln.
[*Gives the briefest of curtsies and then turns away.*]

LINCOLN [*bowing*]. Ma'am.

MARY [*gently turning him toward MERCY*]. Miss Mercy Levering, Mr. Lincoln. [LINCOLN bows.]

MERCY [*with a somewhat disinterested curtsy*]. Oh, Mr. Lincoln, I'm just charmed!

LINCOLN [*bowing*]. Thank you, ma'am.

MARY [*moving him along*]. My brother-in-law you know, and, of course, Mr. Douglas and Mr. Conkling. [*They shake hands, after which MARY guides LINCOLN to R C where they stand. ELIZABETH passes the oranges.*]

DOUGLAS. Oranges! Indeed, I will. [*Takes one.*] How did you get them, Mrs. Edwards?

ELIZABETH. Just lucky. I was there when Mr. Speed unpacked the barrel. Mr. Conkling?

CONKLING [*taking one*]. May I peel one for you, Miss Levering?

MERCY. Oh, Mr. Conkling, you're *too thoughtful*!

ELIZABETH [*less cordially*]. Mr. Lincoln?

LINCOLN [*hesitating; he would like one*]. No, thank you, ma'am.

ELIZABETH [*replacing dish on table*]. Shall we sit down? [ALL sit. NINIAN sits U L. ELIZABETH, MERCY and CONKLING on the sofa. MARY sits in easy chair near door. DOUGLAS grabs the nearby cozy chair from LINCOLN, leaving the chair by table R for LINCOLN. LINCOLN takes chair by the table R, drops into it loosely and sits slouching, hands clasping his knees. ELIZABETH looks at him, then meaningly at MARY, who avoids her eyes.]

DOUGLAS [*peeling his orange*]. I see our esteemed editor has you on the fire again, Mr. Lincoln.

LINCOLN. I've been called worse.

MARY [*concerned*]. What is it?

DOUGLAS [*complacently*]. I just happen to have a copy of the paper with me. [*Takes paper from his pocket.*]

ELIZABETH. Won't you read the item to us?

DOUGLAS [*looking for it*]. It's an editorial—if Mr. Lincoln doesn't mind.

LINCOLN [*caught*]. Go ahead.

DOUGLAS [*enjoying the discomfiture of a rival, finds the place and reads in his clear, resonant voice*]. "Mr. Lincoln has a sort of assumed clownishness in his manner which does not become him . . . will sometimes make his language correspond with this clownish manner, and he can thus frequently raise a loud laugh among his Whig hearers; but this entire game of buffoonery convinces the mind of no man . . . We seriously advise Mr. Lincoln to correct this clownish fault before it grows upon him!"

MARY [*indignantly*]. What an unfair attack! [LINCOLN flashes her a grateful glance and is more at ease. ELIZABETH touches MARY's arm and shakes her head warningly.]

NINIAN [*rallying to the defense of a fellow Whig*]. I agree it's an unfair attack. The Democrats are often unfair. I'll be glad to reply to it for you, if you wish, Mr. Lincoln. [ALL glance expectantly at LINCOLN, awaiting his answer.]

LINCOLN. No, thank you, Mr. Edwards. [*Forcefully.*] Every man has to skin his own skunk. [*The MEN laugh. MARY smiles proudly. ELIZABETH frowns a little, and MERCY is shocked. The tension eases.*]

ELIZABETH [*rising and speaking to NINIAN meaningly*]. My dear—perhaps——

NINIAN. Yes, yes! [*Rises.*] If you young folks can spare us, my wife and I have a call to make. [MEN all rise. Amid general good nights ELIZABETH and NINIAN go out U R C.]

DOUGLAS [*patronizingly, striding up and down in front of MARY. He is the center of attention and happy*]. I think you're right not to make too much of the editorial. We all occasionally fall short of our aim. [*Pauses at C.*]

CONKLING [*concurring*]. No point in getting discouraged.

MARY [*in crisp tones*]. Forgive me if I don't join the wake, I

heard that speech, Mr. Lincoln. It was the most lucid statement of the Whig case I've heard since General Harrison was nominated! Besides—[*Her voice softens.*—]you made your best effort. What more can one ask of you?

LINCOLN [*at ease now and smiling, he strolls to her side*]. Miss Todd, I feel like I once did when I met a woman riding horseback in the woods. She looked at me and said, "I do believe you are the ugliest man I ever saw." Said I, "Madam, you are probably right, but I can't help it!" "No," said she, "you can't help it, but you might stay at home." [ALL, *but MARY, join LINCOLN in a hearty laugh at this anecdote.*]

DOUGLAS [*slapping his knee*]. He might at least stay at home! [*Laughs heartily.*]

MARY [*putting her hand on LINCOLN's arm and speaking earnestly*]. Mr. Lincoln, don't tell cruel stories on yourself! [*LINCOLN, touched by her concern, looks down at her, smiling a little, and pats her hand. Then he sits down in the chair vacated by DOUGLAS. They converse in pantomime. CONKLING has resumed his seat next to MERCY and pretends to be examining her needlework again, as an excuse for standing close and putting his head near hers. They converse in pantomime. DOUGLAS is out of it and glances, irritated, from one absorbed couple to the other.*]

DOUGLAS [*sharply*]. If you Whig stalwarts will excuse a Democrat—I promised to drop in at Julia Jayne's. [*Crosses to archway U R C.*]

MERCY [*rising and moving away from CONKLING, who rises also*]. Mr. Conkling and I'll go with you. I promised to be early. Coming, Mary? [*Slight pause.*] Mr. Lincoln?

LINCOLN [*rising*]. I wasn't invited. I'll just say good night now.

MARY. Please keep me company a while, Mr. Lincoln.

MERCY. Aren't you going to Julia's?

MARY [*rising to bid the company good-bye*]. She doesn't really expect me . . . make my excuses, Mercy, please.

DOUGLAS. Come with us, Miss Todd, please—

MERCY. But Julia said——

MARY [*ending it*]. No, really, I can't. I've things to see to about the buffet dinner. Liz would never forgive me.

MERCY. No? [*Lifts her eyebrows.*] Well, good-bye, then. Good night, Mr. Lincoln. [*Goes to armchair R C with a knowing glance at MARY.*] Don't work too hard.

MARY [*ignoring it*]. Good-bye, until later.

LINCOLN [*mumbling*]. Good night, Miss.

CONKLING [*following MERCY*]. Good night, Miss Todd, Mr. Lincoln. [*Goes out U R C with MERCY.*]

MARY. We'll see you at the supper.

LINCOLN. Good night.

DOUGLAS [*meaningly*]. I'll be back to welcome the New Year with you, Miss Todd. [*Offhand, to LINCOLN.*] Happy New Year, in case I don't see you.

LINCOLN [*awkwardly*]. Happy New Year. [*DOUGLAS goes out U R C.*] You're *sure* I'm not in the way?

MARY. Very sure. Come and tell me everything you've been doing. Eggnog or coffee?

LINCOLN. Coffee, please. [*MARY pulls bell strap on wall U C.*] But haven't you things to attend to for Mrs. Edwards?

MARY. Well—um—chiefly supervision.

LINCOLN [*persisting*]. I'd be glad to help.

MARY [*indicating card basket*]. You might just hang the card basket on the front doorknob.

LINCOLN [*taking it up*]. But won't callers think you're out?

MARY [*evasively*]. They are Elizabeth's callers, really—they'd expect to find her, not me. [*LINCOLN takes basket and goes out U R C.*]

[*ALLIE enters from U R C.*]

ALLIE. You rang, miss?

MARY. Some coffee, please, Allie—for two.

ALLIE. Yes, ma'am. [*She goes out U L. MARY blows out light in window, draws draperies closed and sits on chair U R C.*]

[*LINCOLN returns U R C, without basket.*]

MARY [*smiling invitingly*]. Please sit here. [*Indicates nearby chair.*]

LINCOLN [*sitting*]. I didn't come off so well with your sister and brother-in-law.

MARY. I'm sure you exaggerate.

[*ALLIE enters from U L with tray holding coffee service for two and places it on a small table.*]

ALLIE. Will there be anything else, miss?

MARY. No, thank you. [*ALLIE goes out U R C. MARY serves LINCOLN and herself during the following speeches.*]

LINCOLN. No, it's the truth. I'm a failure socially. But at least I'm not afraid to go to church any more. I just repeat what you once said.

MARY [*mystified*]. What did I say?

LINCOLN. You said there's nothing difficult to behaving in church. You walk in, sit down in a pew, join in the singing, listen to the sermon, bow your head in prayer.

MARY. Isn't that true?

LINCOLN. Yes.

MARY. And all the other social customs are just as simple.

LINCOLN [*enjoying his coffee*]. You make everything sound easy.

MARY [*warmly*]. The amenities are easy——[*Pauses and speaks musingly.*] One thing puzzles me.

LINCOLN. That is——?

MARY [*forcefully*]. The decisions most people find impossibly hard are easy for you.

LINCOLN. Like what?

MARY. Moral decisions. Going against the crowd on principle.

LINCOLN [*at ease now*]. I'd certainly like to qualify for that praise! Why is it you're the only young lady I feel comfortable with?

MARY. Perhaps it's because we're friends.

LINCOLN. It's more than that—but I know so little of what lies beyond friendship! [*Puts aside his cup and leans forward*]

moodily, hands clasped.] Love and marriage . . . so often they kill.

MARY [*reaching out a sympathetic hand to him; but he does not take it*]. You're remembering the death of your mother and sister. It doesn't have to be that way! The world is full of people who love and marry and do only good to each other.

LINCOLN [*moved, taking her hand in his*]. Do you mean . . . could you ever . . . [*Stands up.*] Would you like to be engaged?

MARY [*rising*]. Yes, my darling, I would. [*They embrace.*]

LINCOLN [*still holding her, but a half pace away so that they can talk to each other instead of past each other*]. You don't mind that my prospects are so poor? [*Drops his arms and moves back another half step. They stand close to each other but no longer embracing.*]

MARY. It's only love that matters.

LINCOLN. Yes—for love is eternal. . . . [*Rises and kisses her right hand.*]

MARY [*musingly*]. Love is eternal. . . . [*Warmly.*] Abraham, that's a beautiful thought! After I'm your wife I'll always remember you said that.

LINCOLN [*tenderly*]. Shall I have it engraved inside your wedding ring?

MARY. I'd like that very much, my dear.

LINCOLN. You'll have to coach me. . . . I know you bluegrass people set a lot of store on engagements. . . . Our—our engagement—should we announce it?

MARY. Yes, dearest, we should.

LINCOLN. When do we do that?

MARY. The buffet dinner tonight would be an ideal time.

LINCOLN. We'll announce it then.

MARY. Abraham, I've a perfectly wonderful idea——

LINCOLN. Yes?

MARY. Couldn't we announce our engagement and then have the wedding ceremony right afterwards?

LINCOLN [*wondering*]. And you'll really marry me, just like that!

MARY. Gladly! What fun we'll have getting settled. I've always thought the Houghan house would be the perfect home for a rising young politician like you.

LINCOLN [*jarred and retreating a little downstage*]. The Houghan house—Mary, that's a mansion!

MARY [*following him a step*]. Not really. Just a beautifully planned two-story brick house.

LINCOLN [*backing away another step as if in protest*]. It would cost a fortune.

MARY. Good taste often costs no more than bad.

LINCOLN [*looking down at the floor where he is standing*]. I must have forgotten to mention the national debt I'm trying to pay off.

MARY. Maybe Father would help us . . .

LINCOLN [*quietly but decisively, looking up*]. No, Mary. I'll buy the house—when we get one. We'll just have to wait until I can afford the things you want.

MARY. I'm sorry I ever mentioned the Houghan house. We'll live wherever you say.

LINCOLN. Perhaps, if we wait a year or two . . .

MARY [*taking a step or two D R C*]. In a year or two, will we have more youth—or hope—or courage?

LINCOLN. Money . . . security . . .

MARY [*at D R C turns and faces him*]. Is there security in money? It comes and goes so fast. My dearest, love is the only security.

LINCOLN [*convinced for the moment*]. I'll get the license, Mary.

MARY. Are you sure you can?

LINCOLN. Jim would open the office and get it out for me. [*In the spirit of the plan.*] I'd better be after it.

MARY. And wear your best suit.

LINCOLN [*looking down, worried, at his clothes and gesturing toward them*]. This is my best suit.

MARY. Everyone watches the bride, anyway.

LINCOLN [*hesitating*]. Perhaps after all——

MARY [*going to him and standing on tiptoe to give him a quick kiss and a little push*]. Go along, darling. I've millions of things to see to. [*Hums a few bars of waltz music.*]

LINCOLN [*going toward U R C*]. Later, then.

MARY [*blowing him a kiss*]. Come back soon. [*LINCOLN goes out U R C. MARY pulls the bell strap. She swirls into a waltz step, stopping at C.*]

[*ALLIE enters from U R C.*]

ALLIE. You rang, miss.

MARY. Take the coffee tray.

ALLIE [*taking it*]. Yes, miss. [*Pauses behind couch at U L C.*]

MARY. And, Allie, is there cake for tonight?

ALLIE. Yes, miss. A big one.

MARY. Can you find those decorations they used on the cake when Miss Frances was married?

ALLIE [*agog*]. The wedding fixin's? The bride and groom? Oh, yes, miss, they in the high cupboard!

MARY [*crossing to D C*]. Get them down and bring them in—and the cake.

ALLIE [*going*]. Is they goin' to be a weddin'?

MARY [*going to C*]. I'll see if I can find a couple who wants to marry. . . . And, Allie——

ALLIE [*pausing*]. Yes, miss?

MARY. Not a word to cook or anyone else. It's a big surprise.

ALLIE [*crossing her heart*]. Hope I may die, miss. Right away. [*She goes out U L. A door closes off R.*]

[*ELIZABETH and NINIAN come in U R C. ELIZABETH brings card basket in with her. There are a number of cards in it.*]

ELIZABETH [*crossing to R C*]. Mary, you here? I supposed you'd gone out when I saw the basket on the door.

MARY. I didn't feel like receiving callers——

ELIZABETH [*inspecting a handful of cards from the basket*]. I see Mr. and Mrs. Francis called, and the Dunlaps.

NINIAN [*not interested, crossing to door D R*]. I'm going to rest in my study till the guests arrive. [*Goes out D R.*]

ELIZABETH. They'll be here soon, dear. [*To MARY.*] You seem so keyed up, Mary. Has something happened?

MARY. Only the most wonderful thing in the world, Liz. I'm engaged.

ELIZABETH [*dismayed*]. Not to Mr. Lincoln!

MARY. Oh, Liz, please don't be disappointed. When you know him better, you'll understand.

ELIZABETH. For your sake, I hope so.

[*ALLIE enters U L with a handsome white cake on a tray, and typical bride-and-groom figures.*]

ALLIE [*at U L C*]. I found the decorations, miss.

ELIZABETH. What on earth are you doing with that cake, Allie?

MARY. I told her to bring it in. Just leave it on the table, Allie.

You may go. [*ALLIE places cake on table U L C and goes out U L. MARY crosses to table.*] I'll put the little bride and groom here on top. [*Does so.*] The groom should be taller, but he'll have to do. [*Places decorations.*]

ELIZABETH [*crossing to U C*]. Have you gone out of your mind? You're engaged, yes, but why are you decorating a wedding cake?

MARY [*turning to face her sister*]. Because Abraham and I plan to be married tonight at the coming of the New Year.

ELIZABETH. I don't believe it. You're joking.

MARY. Abraham has gone for the license.

ELIZABETH. This is too rash and sudden. You should wait until you know your mind better!

MARY. I'd feel the same in a hundred years!

ELIZABETH [*cuttingly*]. In a hundred years, Mary? You'd find that your Mr. Lincoln had left no mark at all on his time! He's the kind of man who *lives and dies unnoticed and ineffectual!*

MARY. Liz, dear, there's a hidden greatness you don't sense — [ELIZABETH *smiles and shakes her head.*] Well, then, be happy just to please me! [*Takes ELIZABETH's hand pleadingly.*] I'm so happy I could walk on air!

ELIZABETH [*going to MARY and hugging her*]. Very well, Mary. Your happiness is all I want. Shall I tell Ninian for you?

MARY. No. Let's surprise them all.

ELIZABETH. Then you'd better put the cake out of sight.

MARY. Goodness, yes! [*Picks up cake and holds it proudly.*] My wedding cake! Isn't it lovely?

ELIZABETH [*with forced brightness*]. Into the pantry with it! [*MARY nods and goes happily out U L with the cake. ELIZABETH looks after her sadly. She takes off her gloves and stands, head bent in discouragement. Then she wipes her eyes with a small lace handkerchief. Bell rings.*] Well, there's my future brother-in-law! [*Shakes her head and places gloves on table U C.*]

[NINIAN enters U from D R.]

NINIAN. That must be our first caller.

ELIZABETH. It's probably Mr. Lincoln.

NINIAN. That fellow again!

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Miss Sarah Marshall.

[SARAH MARSHALL enters U R C. *She is a strikingly beautiful girl.*]

ELIZABETH [*nonplussed but pleasant*]. Miss Marshall, good evening. Have you met my husband?

SARAH [*curtsying*]. Good evening, Mr. Edwards.

[MARY enters swiftly from U L but slows down abruptly when she sees it isn't LINCOLN. She continues, however, to advance to greet the guest.]

MARY. Was that—oh, good evening.

ELIZABETH. And my sister, Miss Todd, Miss Marshall.

MARY. But I already know Miss Marshall. [*To SARAH.*] At least, I heard you speak once.

NINIAN. You heard her speak?

MARY. It was at an abolitionist meeting.

NINIAN [*frowning*]. You attend abolitionist meetings, Mary?

MARY. Just the one. [*To SARAH.*] You spoke very persuasively.

SARAH. Then I hope I can be persuasive tonight.

ELIZABETH [*uncertainly*]. I'm afraid we're expecting guests any moment. Perhaps another time——

NINIAN [*firmly*]. There will be no abolitionist speeches in my house! Miss Marshall, much as I oppose slavery, I believe that the abolitionist method is wrong.

MARY. Mr. Lincoln thinks so, too. [*Crosses absently to the window and glances down the street, then turns back letting the curtains fall.*]

SARAH. I did not disturb you on a holiday to present the abolitionist case—but on a far more urgent matter.

ELIZABETH. Won't you sit down?

SARAH. No, thank you. My request can be put briefly——

NINIAN. Surely, some other time——

SARAH. Sir, it is urgent. It concerns the case between Mr. and Mrs. Chinn and their so-called slave, Hannah.

NINIAN. I'm familiar with the case.

ELIZABETH. What is it?

NINIAN. The Chinns brought the slave, Hannah, from Kentucky to Illinois. Now the slave claims that residence in a free state makes her free.

MARY. And doesn't it?

NINIAN. The trial will determine.

ELIZABETH. But if the Chinns can keep slaves in Illinois, won't many other slaveowners bring their slaves here?

NINIAN [*proud of her*]. Exactly. If the Chinns win, it's a precedent that may lead to Illinois becoming a slave state.

MARY [*stepping toward them*]. But that's dreadful——

NINIAN. It's equally true that if the slave girl wins, the precedent will be *against* slavery.

SARAH [*has been following their comments intently, glancing in turn to each speaker*]. Are you also aware that the Chinns have secured a brilliant attorney to represent them?

NINIAN. That is their right.

SARAH. And that the girl, Hannah, hasn't a penny to pay counsel?

NINIAN. I heard some talk of a fund for her defense.

SARAH. We Quakers are collecting the fund—but the contributions are trifling. I came here tonight—hoping that at the New Year you might be moved to contribute . . . substantially. [*Falls silent but follows their conversation tautly.*]

NINIAN [*striding D R, frowning and rubbing his hair and then returning*]. I think not.

ELIZABETH [*anxiously*]. Ninian, surely a small offering——

NINIAN. My dear, the abolitionists have made themselves obnoxious. For my name to appear on an abolitionist fund . . . [*Makes a gesture indicating helplessness.*]

MARY. But if they're endorsing the right cause——

ELIZABETH [*sharply*]. Mary, please. On political matters, Ninian's decision is final.

MARY [*twisting her hands*]. If Abraham would only come!

NINIAN [*sharply*]. And if he did?

MARY. It's as I said—the little amenities don't come easily to him—but decisions that are hard for most people are easy for him.

NINIAN. What sort of decisions?

MARY [*forcefully*]. Moral decisions! I'm certain he'll contribute to the fund!

NINIAN. Moral decisions. [*Strides D R thoughtfully. All watch him motionless. He pauses, strikes one hand hard into the other and returns to them, his decision made.*] I think you may discontinue your efforts to raise money for the defense, Miss Marshall.

SARAH [*biting her lips and clenching her hands to keep back tears of disappointment*]. Sir, I will never drop a concern so important——

NINIAN [*suave and smiling*]. Nevertheless, I think you will discontinue it this very evening. [*Pauses as ALL stare at him.*]

I myself will defend the slave girl—without a fee.

SARAH [*softly, half to herself*]. The ablest lawyer in the state—Sir—[*She can't go on.*]

ELIZABETH [*going to NINIAN and giving him a hug, proudly*].
Ninian, dear!

MARY [*kissing his cheek*]. Sister, you married yourself a man!
[*Bell rings off U R C.*]

NINIAN. Our guests . . .

SARAH. I'll say good night, sir. Good night, Mrs. Edwards, Miss Todd—and many, many happy New Years!

NINIAN. Good night—and tell the slave girl to be at my office in the morning.

SARAH. I will, sir. [*She goes out U R C.*]

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Dr. and Mrs. Houghan.

[*DR. and MRS. HOUGHAN enter from U R C.*]

ELIZABETH [*curtsying*]. Good evening! [*NINIAN and DR. HOUGHAN bow to each other's ladies. NOTE: Throughout the balance of the scene, the arriving guests should bow, curtsy or shake hands, as suitable.*]

MRS. HOUGHAN. A lovely evening for your buffet dinner.

DR. HOUGHAN. Not overtiring yourself, I hope.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. I'm in fine health.

DR. HOUGHAN [*shaking hands with NINIAN*]. Good evening, Mr. Edwards. You're looking well.

NINIAN. Thank you. Some eggnog?

DR. HOUGHAN. In a moment. . . . I must speak to Miss Mary. I'm still hoping you'll some day be the owner of my house, Miss Mary.

MRS. HOUGHAN. It's far too large for us now.

MARY. I've given up the idea of ever owning it.

DR. HOUGHAN. Now, that's a disappointment to us.

MRS. HOUGHAN. We know how much you love it. [*Bell rings.*]

MARY crosses eagerly to U C side of door.]

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Miss Levering. Mistah Conkling.

[MERCY and CONKLING enter through the archway.]

MERCY [*curtsying*]. It's turned sharply cold. [*Stands just inside archway so that she blocks MARY's view of archway and door.*]

CONKLING. And what a wind! [*Follows MERCY as she greets other guests.*]

MERCY [*to MARY*]. Everybody—simply everybody—was at the Jaynes'. They all asked about you.

CONKLING. Julia was particularly disappointed you didn't come.

MARY [*skeptically, trying to peer around MERCY to see if LINCOLN has arrived*]. In that crush?

CONKLING. No, really, she was. [*Greets DR. and MRS. HOUGHAN. MARY ignores them all, crosses to window U L C and looks out. She turns eagerly as bell rings, and crosses back to U C. ELIZABETH frowns and speaks to her in an undertone. NOTE: As many incidental guests as there are extras may be introduced at this point.*]

ALLIE. Mistah Stephen Douglas.

[MR. DOUGLAS appears in archway.]

DOUGLAS [*from U R C*]. I see I'm in time.

NINIAN [*smiling*]. Just barely——Shall we go in to the buffet now, my dear?

MARY. Can't we wait a few minutes longer, Liz?

NINIAN [*jovially*]. Expecting special guests, Mary? They can be shown directly to the dining-room as they arrive. [*Everyone, but MARY, goes out U L, chattering. MARY crosses to window U L C and looks out anxiously.*]

[ELIZABETH reappears at the door U L.]

ELIZABETH. Mary, your absence is noticed. [*Bell rings.*] Come in at once.

MARY [*with deep relief*]. Thank heaven, that must be Abraham!

ALLIE [*announcing*]. Rev. and Mrs. Dresser. [ALLIE *crosses to door U L and goes out.*]

[REV. and MRS. DRESSER *enter U R C.*]

ELIZABETH [*moving forward to U C hospitably*]. Reverend and Mrs. Dresser, I'm so happy to see you. [MRS. DRESSER *stands in front of the chair U C. REV. DRESSER is just behind her, just inside the archway. ELIZABETH is just to the left of MRS. DRESSER. MARY slowly joins them standing a little downstage near C, and greetings are exchanged.*]

REV. DRESSER. I delayed a moment to speak to a young man I hope to have as a parishioner—Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

MARY [*eagerly*]. You saw him?

REV. DRESSER. Just for a moment. He was on urgent business.

MARY [*crossing to him at U R*]. Was he coming from the court-house?

REV. DRESSER [*comfortably*]. Oh, no, nothing routine. He was riding.

MARY [*stepping back, dismayed*]. Riding! But—but which way was he going?

REV. DRESSER [*casually*]. He mentioned something about Urbana. [*To ELIZABETH.*] You're looking very well, Mrs. Edwards.

MARY [*grasping his arm*]. Urbana! Are you *sure* he said he was going there?

MRS. DRESSER [*glancing keenly at MARY*]. My dear, remember how disturbed Mr. Lincoln seemed. Quite likely we misunderstood. . . . He didn't speak clearly at all. [MARY *stands as if stunned her hands clenched at her side.*]

ELIZABETH [*covering for her and speaking comfortably*]. Well, come in to supper. The oysters will be getting cold. [*Moves them toward the dining-room. They precede her out U L. From the room there are cheery cries of "The best of all possible New Years!" "Hear—hear!" etc.*]

[ALLIE *hastily enters a few steps into the room, from U L.*]

ALLIE [*speaking loudly and hurriedly across the room*]. Miss Mary, Mr. Edwards say, "Serve the cake"—But I ain't seen no bride and groom yet! [*MARY wrings her hands in a despairing effort for self-control.*]

ALLIE. Shall I serve it now, miss?

[*ELIZABETH enters U L.*]

ELIZABETH. What is it, Allie?

ALLIE. The weddin' cake, ma'am. Shall I serve it?

ELIZABETH. Shall she, Mary?

MARY [*in a low voice*]. Take off the decorations and serve it, Allie.

ALLIE. Yes, miss. [*Goes out U L.*]

MARY. He's not coming. . . .

ELIZABETH. Contemptible!

MARY, Liz—no! I realize now he didn't want the marriage to-night—only the engagement announcement.

ELIZABETH [*crossing to comfort MARY and putting an arm around her shoulder*]. But not even to send a message—simply ride off!

MARY. My own fault!

ELIZABETH. They're ready for the toasts to the New Year. We'll have to go in.

MARY. I can't face them.

ELIZABETH [*inflexibly*]. You must. You're a Todd of Kentucky! [*Offstage, the group begins to sing softly, "Auld Lang Syne." For a moment the sisters face each other. Then MARY turns swiftly, head held high, and moves to join the group offstage U L. ELIZABETH follows. As the singing swells louder, the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene Two

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *The scene is the same. It is shortly after daybreak on a hot August morning two years later. On the table R is a bowl of drooping garden roses. A few petals are scattered on the table top. ELIZABETH enters from U R C.*

ELIZABETH. Mary? [*She sees room is empty. She pulls bell strap, then crosses to table and begins to pick up fallen petals. Her manner is preoccupied. ALLIE enters U L.*]

ALLIE. Ma'am?

ELIZABETH. Is Miss Mary down yet?

ALLIE. Yes'm. She in the garden.

ELIZABETH. Did she just come down?

ALLIE. No'm. She out there when I got up. Miss Mary sleepin' poorly ever sence——

ELIZABETH [*cutting her short*]. Never mind. Just ask her to come here, please.

ALLIE [*starting D R*]. I will, ma'am.

ELIZABETH [*handing her the bowl of roses*]. Take these with you. Here. [*Tucks fallen petals into bowl.*] Cut some fresh flowers.

ALLIE. Yes'm. [*Goes out R. ELIZABETH busies herself about the room, straightening small things. She doesn't clean anything, as that is taken care of by servants.*]

[*MARY enters from R. She wears an old-fashioned flowered robe with a high neck and long sleeves with lace flounces. Her manner is listless.*]

MARY. Good morning, Liz.

ELIZABETH [*coolly, from D L*]. Good morning. Allie says you're still sleeping poorly.

MARY [*evasively, sitting in chair R*]. It's this hot August weather.

ELIZABETH. Is it? [*MARY doesn't answer. ELIZABETH advances to R C.*] Mary Todd, if you're still mooning about Mr. Lincoln——

MARY [*with a bit of her old spirit*]. Mr. Lincoln is nothing to me——nothing!

ELIZABETH. I should hope not! You were lucky, the way that turned out.

MARY. Lucky!

ELIZABETH. He at least had the decency to start that rumor that you'd jilted him. Even Ninian believes it.

MARY. Instead of the fact that *he* jilted *me*?

ELIZABETH. Don't be so bitter. . . . It's time you forgot him. [*Impatiently paces up and down from U R C to D L C.*] Mary, it seems to me you don't even *try*. You get more moody, instead of less!

MARY. There are other things to think of besides my personal affairs. I don't think about myself *all* the time.

ELIZABETH. I still think your moodiness has something to do with Mr. Lincoln. [*Pauses at C in her pacing, suspicious.*] He hasn't been trying to see you again, has he?

MARY [*bitterly*]. After two years? Hardly! And if he did, it wouldn't make any difference.

ELIZABETH. He might talk you around—he's a good jury lawyer.

MARY. As if I'd even speak to him!

ELIZABETH. Well, you've got some spunk, and if you'd only encourage some of the gentlemen who——

MARY [*wearily, turning away from ELIZABETH and facing up-stage*]. Please, Liz, not again. Not today!

ELIZABETH. Ann keeps writing, asking when she can come on for a visit.

MARY [*troubled*]. I know I'm not being fair to her. I should go back to Lexington. Only——

ELIZABETH. Only what?

MARY. Only I feel I just have to stay on in Springfield a while longer—if you and Ninian don't mind.

ELIZABETH. Mind——? Of course we don't. We *want you* with us.

MARY. But Ann——

ELIZABETH. It's more a sense of duty. . . . Ann's so sharp and tactless! Mary, if I remind you of your opportunities, it isn't——

MARY [*burying her face in her hands, her elbows on the table*]. Please!

ELIZABETH. I see that you don't feel like talking.

MARY. Some other time, Liz.

ELIZABETH. Very well. [*Goes out U R C and L.*]

[*MARY leans her head listlessly on her hand. ALLIE enters from R with a small bowl of fresh flowers, which she places on the table by MARY. She hesitates, looking at MARY with concern.*]

ALLIE. Could I fetch you anything, Miss Mary?

MARY. I—I don't know——[*ALLIE hovers uncertainly. Bell rings.*] See who it is, Allie. [*Slightly rearranges flowers in bowl, lifts it and smells flowers.*]

ALLIE. I will, Miss. [*Goes out U R L and R and re-enters a moment later.*]

ALLIE. Mistah Lincoln. [*ALLIE goes out L.*]

MARY. Mister Lincoln! [*After a startled pause she puts the bowl down.*]

[*LINCOLN stands a moment in the entrance and then comes into the room. His manner is groping and uncertain. He looks at MARY uncertainly for a moment and then walks to upstage end of sofa.*]

MARY [*cuttingly*]. Well, so it's the long-absent Mr. Lincoln!

[*LINCOLN stares at her a moment as if trying to place her, then turns his head slowly, looking over the room as if uncertain where he is.*] To what do I owe the honor of this early morning call?

LINCOLN [*vaguely*]. It's early. . . .

MARY. Early? It's not long after daybreak. Perhaps you're still asleep and imagine it's New Year's Eve two years ago?

[LINCOLN *rubs his hand over his eyes and doesn't answer.*]

MARY [*after a moment's pause, with concern*]. Mr. Lincoln, what's the matter? Is something wrong?

LINCOLN. I'm all right—it's only—[*Rubs his temples.*]*—this ferocious headache.*

MARY. Headache? Won't you sit down?

LINCOLN [*sitting on sofa*]. Almost blind with the pain.

MARY. Have you taken anything for it?

LINCOLN [*shaking head hopelessly, and then putting his head down*]. There isn't anything.

MARY [*surprised*]. They advertise remedies.

LINCOLN. They're nothing but alcohol.

MARY. Well, at least, let me get you a cup of tea. [LINCOLN *doesn't answer. He rubs his head hard and then leans head heavily on his hands. MARY glances at him, goes out U L, and returns almost immediately with a cup of tea. She stands at upstage end of sofa, almost behind it, and puts out her hand to touch his shoulder—then draws back her hand and speaks instead.*]

MARY. Here's the tea.

LINCOLN [*rousing and taking it*]. Thank you. [*Sips it slowly.*]

MARY [*studying him intently*]. At home in Lexington, when we didn't feel well, we always thought tea helped.

LINCOLN [*sipping tea*]. It's very good—I believe it really is helping.

MARY [*coolly*]. It's so odd—your calling this morning—I mean after two years when you never came near me.

LINCOLN [*surprised*]. But I did! I used to walk past your house after the lights were out, almost every night.

MARY [*cuttingly*]. Did it never occur to you that you might ring the bell and make some explanation? Granted that I'd tried to hurry you into a marriage you didn't want.

LINCOLN [*reaching around to put cup on table behind couch*]

and speaking decisively]. Didn't want to marry you, when you're the only woman I've ever loved!

MARY [*musingly*]. The only woman you ever loved? [*Coldly she takes a step toward D R C.*] But of course, men always say that!

LINCOLN [*earnestly, sitting up and leaning forward*]. As I hope for salvation, it's true, Mary.

MARY [*facing away from him toward D R*]. Then I understand less than ever what made you change about the marriage after you left me that night.

LINCOLN [*ill at ease*]. The marriage seemed right enough when I was with you—I felt we'd make a go of it. But then, afterwards, I got to remembering things.

MARY [*half over her shoulder*]. What things?

LINCOLN. Your sister . . .

MARY. What about her?

LINCOLN. Ninian, too . . . the whole thing just seemed too highfalutin' for me. Seemed like I couldn't face them all again in my old suit.

MARY [*half turning toward him*]. Was that all?

LINCOLN [*standing*]. Well, there was all that about the house. [*Takes step or so U L.*]

MARY [*facing squarely about*]. What house?

LINCOLN. The Houghan house. I knew I could never afford to buy it for you.

MARY. But I told you we'd live wherever you said.

LINCOLN [*emphatically*]. Yes—and do you know what sort of house that would be?

MARY [*uncertainly*]. Well—I suppose——

LINCOLN [*continuing forcefully, taking a step or so toward her so he is at D L C*]. It would be something like Rev. Dresser's house over on Eighth Street.

MARY [*placing it*]. Reverend Dresser's house—sort of a cabin.

LINCOLN. It's well built. But that's all I could offer the daughter of the Bluegrass Todds—the sister of Mrs. Ninian Edwards.

MARY [*speaking with spirit, moving from D R to D R C*]. And

if that was all you could have offered, we'd have lived there and been happy. But it just happens that as your wife I'd look forward to a *far better house than that!*

LINCOLN [*speaking in puzzled voice*]. The Houghan house?

MARY [*clearly and forcefully*]. I mean the White House in Washington, D.C.

LINCOLN. The White House? [*Pauses, and then speaks tensely.*]
You can't mean it!

MARY [*meeting his eyes directly*]. You can go farther than most men—and you're needed. [*Speaks musingly, and now her eyes seem to see into the future.*] There is a storm gathering in our country!

LINCOLN [*crossing to C*]. Mary——

MARY [*meeting him at C*]. Nights when I can't sleep, I feel it coming——

LINCOLN [*tenderly, taking her hand*]. My dear——

MARY [*tensely*]. I can't lie still. I walk up and down thinking of others who are wakeful, too—slaves who've been lashed and are in pain—slave women who've been separated from their babies—and I know my father must often lie awake because he once did a shameful thing!

LINCOLN. A shameful thing? Your father!

MARY. He ordered slaves sold down the river—without restriction on families—even Tamar and Chloe. [*Musingly.*] Husbands and wives separated, children without their parents—and it happens every day!

LINCOLN [*concerned*]. My dearest, you can't bear all these sorrows. There's nothing you can do about slavery.

MARY [*speaking with utter faith and conviction*]. No. . . .
But you can.

LINCOLN [*moved*]. You feel that about me?

MARY. I couldn't be more certain of that! [*Speaks softly then in a puzzled tone.*] But what puzzles me is: Why did you come here today? What happened?

LINCOLN. I don't know.

MARY. You *must* know.

LINCOLN. I remember walking the streets in the dark with this blinding headache, and I kept remembering you as I saw you that New Year's Eve, blowing me a kiss and saying, "Come back soon."

MARY [*touched, giving him her hand*]. You remembered that?

LINCOLN. I don't know how I got here. Suddenly Allie was opening the door, and I saw I was in Ninian's home . . . and you were standing before me. . . . Mary, can you ever forgive me?

MARY. We must forgive each other.

LINCOLN [*capturing her other hand*]. And you'll marry me in spite of everything? [*For a moment, uncertain, MARY keeps him at arm's length. Then she smiles teasingly.*]

MARY. Is it really safe to say "yes"?

LINCOLN [*emphatically*]. It is! You set the course, Mary. I'll steer the flatboat. Any landing you say. [*He sweeps her into his arms. Her arms go around his neck.*]

[ELIZABETH, *entering from U R C, stops short in startled surprise and dismay, looking at them.*]

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE: *The family sitting room in the west wing of the White House in the 1860's is the same basic set. Different accessories give it a more formal appearance, although the over-all effect is definitely scuffed and shabby. There may be framed portraits of earlier presidents or first ladies. The time is about ten A.M. on a hot summer day.*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: ELIZABETH GRIMSLEY (BETH) is seated at the desk R, opening letters. She slices envelopes, sometimes merely glances at the contents, and places letters on one of four piles before her. Once or twice she reads a letter.]

BETH [*reading an offending letter*]. The insolence! [*Slaps it down on pile four and picks up another. It is on colored paper. This one she doesn't finish. She puts it down as if it burns her fingers.*] Oh! [*There is a timid rap at door D R. BETH glances up*]. Come in. [*Rap sounds again. BETH speaks impatiently and louder.*] Come in!

[FIRST CALLER enters. She is a little, stout pale woman, plainly dressed without any effort at style. She is nervous and tense. She stands silent just inside the door.]

BETH. Can I do something for you?

FIRST CALLER [*uncertainly, clasping her hands on her shabby purse*]. Ma'am, are you Mrs. Lincoln?

BETH. I'm her cousin. Do you have an appointment with Mrs. Lincoln?

FIRST CALLER. I—no—I wanted to see the President.

BETH [*crisply*]. Then you should go to the executive offices.

These are the family living quarters.

FIRST CALLER [*tensely*]. I don't know where the offices are.

BETH [*more kindly*]. Go back the way you came. Through the double doors and beyond the main staircase.

FIRST CALLER [*worried*]. But it's all packed solid with men—right down through the vestibule. *And* even outside. [*Nods toward window U L C.*] I was afraid—they seemed so angry!

BETH. Remember, these are war times and feelings run high. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you'll just have to wait your turn.

FIRST CALLER [*desperately*]. But I have to see him today. It's so important! [*Pauses and speaks in a confused voice.*] I—thank you, miss. [*Goes out D R. BETH looks after her a moment, a bit troubled by her urgency; then, shaking her head, she makes a little helpless gesture with her hands and resumes her work.*]

[STACKPOLE enters U R C.]

STACKPOLE. The Secretary of War is waiting.

BETH [*impressed, rising*]. Show him in at once. [STACKPOLE goes out and returns at once, announcing impressively.]

STACKPOLE. The Honorable Secretary of War, Mr. Edwin Stanton.

[STANTON enters with dignity. STACKPOLE bows slightly and goes out.]

BETH [*dropping a slight curtsy*]. Good morning, Mr. Secretary.

STANTON. Good day, ma'am. Please announce me to the President.

BETH. I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary, but Mr. Lincoln has gone out.

STANTON [*frowning*]. To his office?

BETH. Yes, sir.

STANTON. Very well. [*Bows slightly and goes out U R C.*]

BETH [*again resuming work, placing items in pile two*]. Bills!

[MARY enters briskly from U L.]

MARY [*speaking happily*]. Good morning, Beth.

BETH [*rising and turning*]. Good morning, Cousin Mary.

MARY [*crossing and looking through curtain at window*]. They're still there! [*Her face darkens and she tucks her hands shiveringly under her elbows. There is a murmur from the crowd outside, as if they have seen her.*]

VOICE [*offstage, jeeringly*]. Southerner! Copperhead!

MARY. Some day there'll be stones through this window!

BETH. Before that, we'll have a victory—then they'll be cheering instead. I've finished the mail.

MARY [*turning from window*]. You're always ahead of me.

BETH [*sitting at desk and pushing forward a small pile of letters*]. These are from relatives or friends.

MARY. They want appointments, I suppose?

BETH [*ruefully*]. I'm afraid they do. [*Picks out one.*] This one is from your minister in Springfield. He wants to be consul at. . . . Let's see. . . . Yes, here it is, consul at Dundee.

MARY [*advancing to C, considering*]. It's a minor post.

BETH [*warningly*]. Cousin, mayn't I write him to apply through the usual channels?

MARY [*turning to face her, a bit scornfully*]. The usual channels? That means his letter won't even be seen until months after the appointment is made.

BETH. Still, if it gets known he appealed to you——

MARY [*indignantly*]. Why shouldn't he? I know his loyalty to Mr. Lincoln, and that he's well qualified for the post.

BETH [*concerned*]. Won't you be criticized for interfering?

MARY. Mr. Lincoln has to make thousands of such appointments. Why shouldn't he occasionally appoint a loyal friend instead of just the recommendations of politicians?

BETH [*still reluctant*]. I know it makes sense—only——[*MARY makes a notation on letter and hands it to BETH.*]

MARY [*ending it*]. Give this to Mr. Lincoln's secretary.

BETH [*putting letter aside*]. I'll see to it. [*Pushes forward a larger pile of papers.*] Here are the invitations.

MARY [*glancing at one on top and then replacing it*]. Anything that can't be declined?

BETH [*rising and moving a few steps U C*]. Nothing important.

MARY [*pushing the pile aside*]. Take care of them for me.
[*Draws forward the third pile.*] And the others?

BETH. Just bills.

MARY [*picking one up and scanning it*]. French brocade . . .
m'mm . . . gilt molding. [*Frowns, moving her fingers nervously.*] I didn't think it would be so much! [*Begins to leaf through remaining bills. Her lips move as if she is adding the totals.*]

BETH [*turning at U C to face MARY*]. But redecorating is always expensive, and it had to be done. Mrs. Watt told me the paper was peeling off the walls and the upholstery worn right through. [*Outside the window there is a sound of jeering and catcalls. Both women turn and look at window. BETH crosses to window and looks out.*]

MARY. What are they shouting about?

BETH [*listening*]. I can't make out.

MARY. Send Stackpole to find out. [*BETH goes out U R C and R, and returns quickly.*]

BETH [*from U R C*]. I sent him.

MARY [*her attention back on the bills, picking up a pile*]. I didn't actually *have* to redecorate. [*Walks U L C.*] Maybe I was right at first when I said all that could wait until we'd won the war.

BETH. I wasn't here then, Cousin. What made you change your mind?

MARY [*turning and speaking sharply, her voice rather high and strained*]. What made me change? The attacks on Mr. Lincoln, of course. [*Her voice deepens.*] They said he was a backwoodsman, unfit for high office. That he was content to live in surroundings no statesman would tolerate! [*More thoughtfully.*] Besides, when we talked it over . . . with the South pushing for recognition abroad, it seemed important to make a good impression on the foreign diplomats—we needed the respect of the countries they represent. [*Smiles a little and gestures.*] But I've spent nothing on our own living quarters.

BETH. Well, even the opposition papers praise the elegance of the public rooms as they are now. [*Crosses to desk.*]

MARY [*fingering bills again*]. Yes, I bought only the best . . . but . . .

BETH. But what?

MARY [*crossing to D R*]. Caryl's wouldn't give me a firm estimate. They said they couldn't tell how much it would be until they'd finished. Did we—[*Bites lip.*—]—did we go over the appropriation? [BETH *nods.*] Much? [*Another nod.*] Exactly how much?

BETH [*slowly*]. Almost seven thousand dollars. [MARY *rubs her hand across her eyes as she walks to behind couch. BETH is concerned.*] Cousin, don't worry. Think of the result. You're still far under what other first ladies spent!

[STACKPOLE *enters U R C.*]

STACKPOLE [*standing near archway*]. Ma'am.

MARY. Did you find out what that disturbance in the crowd was about?

STACKPOLE [*uncomfortably*]. Yes, ma'am. It was just a few noisy ones.

MARY. But what was it about?

STACKPOLE. Well—they saw the roll of new carpeting from Caryl's being carried into the White House.

MARY [*puzzled*]. All that fuss over a roll of new carpeting! What was it they were shouting?

STACKPOLE [*at a loss how to tell her*]. They said—uh—[*Pauses. He sees BETH urgently signaling him, finger on her lip, shaking her head, hesitates and then recovers smoothly.*] I didn't catch the words, ma'am. I really couldn't say. Will that be all?

MARY. Yes—and thank you. [STACKPOLE *bows slightly and goes out U R C.*]

BETH [*picking up an invitation or two*]. You've been working too hard! It's too exhausting to visit the wounded every day.

If you had a little relaxation—[*Proffers invitations.*] These really sound like fun.

MARY [*crossing, handing bills to BETH and taking invitations*].

There'll be time for all that after the war. [*Her voice warms.*] Then!—dances, the theater, perhaps even Europe.

BETH [*looking at her appraisingly*]. Your mood's so different today. Is there better news? Has General McClellan fought a battle—at last?

MARY [*vaguely*]. General McClellan? I don't think so. [*Wanders to D L.*] Oh, Beth, I can't explain, but I believe today will yet be the happiest day of my life!

BETH. The happiest day of your life? [*Impulsively covers the fourth pile of letters with her hands.*] Then don't read these!

MARY. The abusive ones? [*BETH nods. MARY crosses to desk, hands back the invitations, and measures the fourth pile with finger and thumb. She holds her hand off, inspecting the span. Sadly.*] More than ever! [*BETH nods reluctantly.*] Well, I'll just glance at them. [*Picks up a letter.*] M'mm—"to be expected of an ignorant backwoods woman like you." [*Puts letter down and takes up another. This one consists of several pages, which MARY scans rapidly.*] M'mm. [*Turns page.*]—spend my time reading French novels . . . indifferent to mm . . . mm . . . oh, well—[*Puts letter down and pushes pile aside, then walks to C.*]

BETH. I don't see how you can take these unfair attacks so calmly.

MARY. I didn't at first. I even bothered Mr. Lincoln about them.

BETH. What did *he* advise?

MARY [*smiling*]. He told me a story.

BETH [*smiling and sitting down*]. A story?

MARY. Some travelers were lost in wild country on a pitch-black, stormy night. A bolt crashed nearby and the travelers dropped on their knees. "Oh, Lord," prayed one of them, "if it's all the same to You, give us a little *more* light and a good deal less noise!" [*There is sound of a brief scuffle offstage U R C. Both women turn toward U R C, listening.*]

MRS. WATT [*offstage* U R C]. You can't go in like that!

TAD [*offstage* U R C]. Let go of me! I want Mother!

[TAD, a boy of from seven to ten, comes in from R through U R C archway, with JANE trying to hold him back. He holds a handkerchief to his bleeding nose. His hair is rumpled and his shirt sleeve torn.]

JANE [*in archway, trying to pull him back*]. You come with me, Master Tad! [BETH turns to desk during this next brief scene and works.]

TAD [*at same time*]. Mother, she says I can't come in!

MARY. Never mind, Mrs. Watt. [MRS. WATT lets go of TAD and goes off L through archway.] Tad, you've been fighting again! [TAD crosses to her. She half kneels, smooths his hair.]

Have you forgotten you promised Mother not to fight?

TAD [*gulping*]. I—I'm sorry, Mother. I just had to!

MARY. Had to? Why?

TAD. The boys at school yelled things—all of 'em.

MARY [*sadly, rising and standing with her hand on his shoulder*]. Yelled what, Tad?

TAD. They yelled we're mudsills! [*Gulps and digs a fist into his eyes.*] What is a mudsill, Mother?

MARY [*with forced lightness, but clenching her hands*]. It only means people who live in cabins with dirt floors. [*Cheerily.*]

Now, Tad, you know if the White House floors are ever dirty, it's only because so many people keep pushing in to see Father. Don't you?

TAD [*gulping*]. Yes'm.

MARY. Then pay no attention to what they say and go along with Mrs. Watt and get tidied up before father sees you. He has worries enough!

TAD. Yes'm. [*Runs out through archway* U R C and L.]

BETH [*turning from her work*]. I often wish Cousin Lincoln would forbid all these office-seekers pouring through the White House.

MARY. It's the custom. . . . I haven't been able to use the front

door or the main stairs in weeks. But I don't really mind, except when their mood seems ugly—like that crowd outside—[*Gestures toward window.*—]—or when they come charging into our family rooms. [*Wanders to couch and sits in center of it.*]

BETH. There was one in here this morning—a woman.

MARY. What did she want?

BETH. She didn't say. She just asked for the President——
[*Glances toward door by which woman left, frowning a little.*]

MARY. What troubles you about her, Beth?

BETH. Nothing . . . it was only . . . she seemed—almost desperate.

MARY. Well——[*Dismissing it.*—]—were there any messages?

BETH. Cousin Lincoln will join you for coffee. I ordered it served here . . . and Mr. Stoddard wants to see you when you're free.

MARY. Ask him to come in.

[*BETH goes out R and returns a moment later with MR. STODDARD. He is a young newspaper man, intensely loyal to the Lincolns. He has a portfolio and several newspapers under his arm. BETH re-seats herself at desk, takes pile of invitations and busies herself writing notes declining them.*]

MARY [*greeting him warmly*]. Mr. Stoddard.

STODDARD [*bowing with respect, from C*]. Mrs. Lincoln—there's been good news?

MARY [*smiling*]. Not yet—but I expect it before the day is over.

STODDARD. Then you've had a message from the President? I hardly thought you'd have heard so soon—or that you'd take it so calmly.

MARY. Oh, this is nothing Mr. Lincoln knows about—in any definite way. It's something I feel is about to happen——
[*Appealing to him.*] Don't you think one sometimes has premonitions, Mr. Stoddard?

STODDARD [*hesitating; he doesn't think so, but he is devoted to her*]. Well, er . . . there are coincidences. [*Crosses to behind couch.*]

MARY [*swiftly, not heeding*]. An old teacher of mine once warned me that perhaps my greatest ambition might only be achieved through a husband. [*Clasps her hands tensely.*] To-day when I wakened—[*Pauses and speaks musingly.*—they say coming events cast their shadows before them. But this casts a brightness like sunshine before it. Mr. Stoddard, I feel today may be the happiest day of my life.

STODDARD [*fervently*]. I hope it is! [*There is a commotion off-stage U R C. ALL turns toward it.*]

STACKPOLE [*offstage U R C*]. You can't go in there!

TAXPAYER [*offstage U R C*]. Just you try and stop me! Just try!

[*TAXPAYER enters from R through archway U R C. She is spinsterish in appearance, and grimly determined. She has an umbrella in her hands and seems as if she might have used it as a club. She looks back in triumph and sheathes her umbrella, in effect, by hooking the curved handle over her arm.*]

TAXPAYER [*in doorway U R C*]. I'm a taxpayer!

STACKPOLE [*right behind her*]. I tried to stop her, ma'am.

MARY. It's all right, Mr. Stackpole. [*After a hard glare at the*

TAXPAYER *who returns a coldly triumphant smile, STACKPOLE goes out U R C.*] Is there something I can do for you?

TAXPAYER [*still a bit belligerent*]. I came to see the President.

STODDARD. The executive offices are on the other side of the main staircase.

TAXPAYER. I couldn't get in there. It's jam-packed.

MARY. I'm afraid you'll have to wait your turn.

TAXPAYER [*turning to go*]. Hmph! [*Glances around room.*] Is this where he lives?

MARY. Yes, these are our *private* rooms.

TAXPAYER. Are you Mrs. Lincoln?

MARY. Yes.

TAXPAYER. Well, I went through all the rooms downstairs and you ain't done so bad fixing them up. [*Glances around room scornfully.*] Looks like you might have pride enough to fix up your own livin' quarters.

MARY [*keeping her temper with an effort*]. Perhaps I'll get to them in time. [*Pointedly.*] Good day, ma'am.

TAXPAYER. Well, it's President Lincoln I come to see, so I'll waste no more time here. Good day. [*Goes out U R C.*]

BETH. What a disagreeable person!

MARY. As a matter of fact, our visitor said some very sensible things.

STODDARD. She certainly was rude enough!

MARY [*gay again*]. But this room really *is* a fright.

STODDARD [*demurring politely*]. Oh, no——

MARY. Isn't it, Beth?

BETH [*putting aside her pen*]. Since you ask, it *is* a fright.

STODDARD. Then why not fix it up? [*Moves to side of couch.*]

MARY [*hesitating*]. It's just that the bills for redecorating the public rooms are so heavy—I scarcely dare show them to my husband.

STODDARD [*coming to C*]. But Congress appropriated funds for the purpose.

MARY. I spent more.

STODDARD [*surprised*]. More than twenty-six thousand dollars?

MARY. Men just don't understand how much things cost—things like a carpet for a room eighty feet long and forty feet wide.

STODDARD. How much more did you spend?

MARY [*hesitating*]. About six thousand . . . [*Glances at BETH, who does not look at her.*] Well—closer to seven thousand.
[STODDARD whistles softly.]

BETH [*with spirit*]. Please remember, Mr. Stoddard, Andrew Jackson spent forty-five thousand dollars on White House renovations and President Van Buren spent sixty thousand, and——

STODDARD [*holding up hands in mock surrender*]. Ladies, please! I'll present the bills to Mr. Lincoln.

MARY [*crisply*]. And now, Mr. Stoddard, the papers.

STODDARD [*reluctantly, crossing to table U C and picking up several newspaper clippings*]. One or two are rather amusing——

MARY. Amusing? How so?

STODDARD [*reading*]. "Her Majesty, Mrs. Lincoln, is doing much to make King Abraham unpopular." [*Pauses, speaking hopefully but without conviction.*] That's amusing, don't you think?

MARY [*not amused*]. Perhaps. Go on. [*Rises and paces back and forth from U L C to D R.*]

STODDARD. Well—uh—the rest isn't worth listening to.

MARY [*firmly*]. Read on, Mr. Stoddard.

STODDARD [*reluctantly reading*]. "Her conduct is that of an uneducated female without good sense, who has been unluckily elevated into a sphere for which she cannot fit herself." [*Tosses paper into wastebasket upstage of desk.*] That's all in that one.

BETH [*indignantly*]. Uneducated! You, Cousin!

MARY. Never mind . . . [*To STODDARD.*] The other papers?

STODDARD [*violently*]. They're a tissue of slander, Mrs. Lincoln! Don't ask me to report on them!

MARY. But you report to the President what they say of him, don't you?

STODDARD. He insists—calls it his daily bath of public opinion.

MARY. Then give me a resumé of what they say about me. [*Earnestly.*] I must know, if I'm to be a real help to him when he's so hard pressed.

BETH [*rising and moving forward protestingly*]. Cousin Mary, no. Remember, this is to be your happiest day.

MARY [*with steadfast faith*]. It will be! [*to STODDARD.*] What do they say?

STODDARD [*not looking at her*]. Ma'am, they say you're a spy.

MARY [*half whispering it*]. A spy!

STODDARD [*getting it over with*]. They say you receive private mail from Confederate generals—send them information on Federal Army strength—that the Union dead being pulled out of the river under the Long Bridge should be piled on your doorstep.

MARY [*moving back a step, half whispering it*]. No!

STODDARD. They say you are determined that slavery must continue at whatever cost——

MARY [*her hand at her throat*]. I, determined that slavery continue——

STODDARD. Today, the crowning insolence: A Congressional Committee is investigating the charges against you.

MARY [*sinking onto extreme left end of sofa, as BETH hurries to her side*]. Does—does my husband know?

STODDARD. I brought it to his attention personally, ma'am.

MARY [*leaning forward*]. What did he say?

STODDARD. Nothing. He left abruptly. He didn't even take his hat.

MARY. And I tried to be a help to him!

BETH [*anxiously*]. Cousin, can I——

MARY [*rising, urgency in voice and manner*]. I must pack—at once! I should never have come here!

BETH. Pack—to go where?

MARY [*brokenly as she moves around couch toward door U L*]. Home—back to Springfield.

BETH [*protesting*]. To Springfield!

MARY [*pausing behind couch*]. Don't you see? I can not be a help to him and I must not be a burden. He has all one man can carry without this.

STODDARD [*firmly*]. Mrs. Lincoln, I beg you, take no action without the approval of the President.

MARY [*uncertainly*]. You think I should wait?

STODDARD [*decisively*]. To do otherwise would only increase his burdens.

MARY. You think so? [*He nods.*] Then I must wait. [*More*

strongly, to BETH.] Never mind, Beth——[*To STODDARD.*]
The other papers.

STODDARD. Ma'am, as a favor to me, may I bring to your attention the things in the paper you should see—and dispose of the rest in the appropriate place? [*Indicates wastebasket.*]

MARY. You're very kind. I'll be grateful to you. [*STODDARD dumps papers in wastebasket.*]

BETH [*crossing to desk*]. And may I do the same with the letters?

MARY. Thank you, Cousin. [*Pushes hair back from her face wearily.*] We still have our work. [*Walks to c.*] Did you order the oranges and lemons?

BETH. They'll be delivered this afternoon.

MARY. There was money enough in my purse?

BETH [*smiling*]. I may have added a few dollars of my own.

STODDARD [*puzzled, glancing from BETH to MARY*]. Surely the White House Commissary can supply its tables with fruit.

BETH. Mr. Stoddard, the fruit is not for our tables.

MARY. Beth, please——

BETH [*firmly*]. Cousin, let me speak this once! [*To STODDARD.*]

Mrs. Lincoln spends every afternoon in the hospitals visiting the wounded, writing letters for them, encouraging those fatally injured. She has stripped our larders of delicacies for them.

STODDARD [*softly*]. Then the oranges and lemons——

BETH. Are for the wounded.

MARY. The doctors say they urgently need it. [*Crosses to easy chair U L.*] The army rules that fruit is unnecessary for the sick.

BETH. So Cousin Mary and her friend, Mrs. Caleb Smith, buy it with their own money.

STODDARD. But no one knows of this!

MARY [*proudly*]. My husband knows of it, and it eases his mind a little of the awful grief he feels for these young men—that, in some slight way, I do for them what I can,

STODDARD [*grasping in that moment the whole future scope of paid publicity staffs, almost sighing the words*]. What an opportunity! What a priceless opportunity! [*He faces down-stage.*]

MARY [*not understanding his thought, turning and facing him*].

Yes, isn't it? When I see some poor lad's face brighten, because I remind him of his mother—and when I can repeat to Mr. Lincoln some word of steadfast loyalty—it seems to me I have the greatest opportunity any woman ever had.

STODDARD [*not heeding, speaking as if to himself or BETH*].

Sketches of Mrs. Lincoln handing fruit to the wounded—showing her bending over a hospital bed, her hand on a soldier's brow, or seated at a bedside writing letters! [*Excitedly, he turns to MARY.*] Ma'am, you must *let me handle this. You must have artists and journalists with you on every visit!*

MARY [*amazed*]. Artists—journalists—what *are you talking of?*

STODDARD [*taking three steps toward her*]. Let me handle the details. [*Rubs his hands with satisfaction.*] Afterwards, you must invite them back to the White House for coffee and cake——

MARY. But—sir, it isn't a party! These boys are desperately wounded—many of them are dying.

STODDARD [*enthusiastically*]. I'll guarantee that in a few weeks you'll be the most popular First Lady in history.

MARY [*crossing to him, smiling and shaking her head gently*].

Dear Mr. Stoddard, thank you!

STODDARD [*eager to be off*]. Then I've your permission to arrange it?

MARY. I'm very grateful for your concern for the President and me—but the answer is 'no.'

STODDARD [*urgently*]. Ma'am, you can't realize——

MARY [*putting her middle finger against STODDARD's chest*]. If

I had something to gain from these poor, dying boys beyond the happiness of easing their pain and loneliness by letting

them know that the President appreciates their sacrifice—I think—I really think I would die of shame! [*MARY walks to couch and sits down in the middle.*]

STODDARD [*knowing he's defeated but not quite accepting it, walking over to BETH*]. Miss Grimsley. Help me persuade her——

BETH [*smiling, proud of MARY, shaking her head a little*]. I'm afraid it can't be done, Mr. Stoddard. You see, she really is the First Lady.

STODDARD. But she's charged with treason! If the public only knew——

[*The door D R opens quickly and LINCOLN enters. He crosses directly to MARY.*]

LINCOLN. William told you about the investigation?

MARY [*tensely*]. Yes—he told me.

LINCOLN [*sitting down on couch beside her and kissing her cheek*]. You need never worry about this nonsense again, Mary. It is over.

MARY. Thank you, Abraham.

STODDARD [*taking his portfolio from table*]. If you'll excuse me, sir, ladies. [*Bows slightly. MARY and BETH incline their heads a trifle.*]

LINCOLN. You'll find plenty to do in my office. [*STODDARD nods and goes out D R. BETH resumes work at the desk.*]

[*TAD enters U R C, now clean and tidy, and leans on back of couch between his parents.*]

LINCOLN. Taddie home? Why aren't you in school?

TAD. Fightin' again! [*Grins at his father, who pats his head fondly.*] Father, do you like being President?

LINCOLN. Well, Taddie, it's something like the case of the man they tarred and feathered and rode out of town on a rail. He said: "If it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather walk."

TAD [*leaning affectionately on LINCOLN's shoulder*]. Me, too!

[STACKPOLE enters U R C with coffee service and plate of toast on a light, small tray. He places it before MARY who pours coffee, and gives it to LINCOLN. She passes the toast; LINCOLN takes a piece, and TAD grabs two pieces. TAD follows tray of food around and stands on downstage side of table with tray, his back to audience.]

MARY [*reprovingly*]. Tad!

LINCOLN [*smiling*]. A growing boy.

TAD [*sitting on arm of sofa near his father, munching toast. His pose is a replica of Lincoln's in Act One*]. The third grade boys all say you wouldn't be a bad President if only you could make General McClellan fight. Why can't you, Father?

LINCOLN. He isn't a fighter. I see that now—yet he was the best I had.

TAD. But that's what soldiers do—they fight. [*Grins at MARY.*] Maybe I'll be a soldier!

LINCOLN. They do other things, too. General McClellan builds good armies, trains them well; but he's scared by every rumor of enemy strength.

MARY. More coffee? [*Refills his cup.*] Can't he be forced to act?

LINCOLN. He may be—I've put in Stanton as Secretary of War.

MARY [*abruptly setting down coffee pot with which she was about to refill her cup*]. Stanton—but he's opposed to you!

LINCOLN. Well, he's called me a damned fool more than once! [*MARY sits up, her head high and eyes flashing anger. TAD drops piece of toast he has just filched and stares at his father.*] But he's usually right. [*Considers, and smiles.*] He may be, on that point, too.

MARY [*recovering her poise and noting toast*]. Tad! Pick up your toast at once! [*TAD does so, immediately.*]

BETH [*rising and coming forward, tactfully*]. Won't you show me your goats, Tad?

TAD [*rising*]. Sure will. Come on, Mother and Father, let's feed them.

LINCOLN [*smiling*]. Another time, Taddie. [*The PARENTS watch, smiling, as TAD snatches another piece of toast and goes out, pulling BETH off stage U R C to R.*]

BETH [*as they go off*]. Now, now, not so fast.

[*STACKPOLE enters with a packet of mail, which he puts on desk. On his heels D R, FIRST CALLER slips into room.*]

FIRST CALLER [*in doorway, timidly*]. Excuse me, please.

MARY [*surprised*]. Who are you?

STACKPOLE [*putting down mail on desk with an indignant slap*]. I've told her a dozen times today she's got to have an appointment to see you, sir.

FIRST CALLER [*stepping forward tensely to R C*]. Sir, are you — [*Relieved.*] You are the President!

LINCOLN [*rising and facing her*]. I am—but you'll have to wait your turn if you have business.

FIRST CALLER. Sir, it's urgent—there isn't time——

LINCOLN [*a bit sadly*]. They all say that, ma'am. I'm sorry.

STACKPOLE [*officiously, going to door D R*]. This way, ma'am.

FIRST CALLER [*putting her hand to base of throat, swallowing and getting out words with difficulty*]. It's about my son, sir.

LINCOLN. Ask for the earliest appointment.

STACKPOLE [*gesturing*]. This way—[*Snaps his fingers impatiently. The CALLER stands, dazed with trouble and unable to assert herself. Her hands twist on her worn handbag. MARY is watching her keenly, sensing her trouble.*]

FIRST CALLER [*pleadingly*]. Ma'am——[*Can't go on.*]

MARY [*rising impulsively and speaking to LINCOLN*]. Couldn't you make an exception . . . I feel somehow you should.

LINCOLN [*relieved*]. Perhaps I should. [*To CALLER.*] How can I help you?

MARY [*to STACKPOLE*]. You may go. [*STACKPOLE stalks out U R C.*]

FIRST CALLER [*stepping forward and speaking almost in a whisper*]. It's my son. He's to be shot.

MARY [*shocked*]. Your son shot! Why?

LINCOLN [*interposing, he takes a step or so U C*]. I'm afraid this is a matter for the War Department, not me.

FIRST CALLER [*stepping forward, speaking more urgently*]. They've already decided—against him.

LINCOLN [*turning to face her*]. McClellan reviewed the facts? [*FIRST CALLER tries to speak and can't. She nods. MARY pours cup of coffee and puts it in her hand; the women swallows it thirstily and hands back the cup to MARY, who puts it down, hardly noticing.*]

FIRST CALLER [*speaking more firmly now*]. General McClellan approved the sentence.

LINCOLN [*sharply*]. When is it to be carried out?

FIRST CALLER [*putting back of hand to her eyes and almost whispering*]. Tomorrow. [*MARY crosses to stand just D R as if to lend more support. The CALLER takes papers from her shabby purse and offers them. She speaks dully.*] It's all here.

LINCOLN [*taking papers and glancing over them*]. I've heard something of this case. [*Adjusts his spectacles to look at papers, and then peers at her over them.*] He's charged with sleeping on guard duty. Do you realize how serious that is? [*She nods.*] Do you claim the charge is false?

FIRST CALLER. No, sir. It's true. But they kept him on duty continuous—he wasn't relieved—and he's just barely eighteen. [*Her voice breaks, and MARY takes her hand firmly in hers. Both WOMEN look tensely at LINCOLN.*]

LINCOLN [*rising and speaking drawlingly*]. Well, seems to me McClellan might sympathize a bit with a soldier who sleeps on duty—he's been asleep for two years himself! [*Scribbles notation on papers.*] Show this to the guard at the War Department. He'll put you in touch with the right official.

FIRST CALLER [*confused with sudden relief*]. Oh, thank you, sir—ma'am! I——[*Turns to go, hurries to door D R, turns back.*] I mean, thank you! [*Goes out D R.*]

MARY. What did you write?

LINCOLN. I told McClellan to let the boy fight. [*Passionately.*]

Doesn't the enemy kill enough of our boys? Why should we kill them ourselves? [*Puts hand on her shoulder.*] Thank God, you made me listen to her!

[STACKPOLE enters U R C.]

STACKPOLE. The Secretary of War is waiting.

LINCOLN [*surprised*]. Mr. Stanton? Show him in at once!

[STACKPOLE goes out and returns at once, announcing impressively.]

STACKPOLE. The Honorable Secretary of War, Mr. Edwin Stanton—and Master Tad. [*Bows slightly and goes out.*]

[STANTON enters U R C. He is dripping wet and furiously angry. He has TAD by the collar, dragging him in.]

MARY. Mr. Stanton! [*Comes forward.*] What happened?

STANTON [*spluttering, from archway*]. Look at me! Just look! [*Gestures to his dripping clothes with one hand, while with the other he clutches TAD.*]

LINCOLN [*stifling a smile*]. The Secretary of War looks like he's met a military reversal.

STANTON. I was coming to you, Mr. President, when this brat of madam's—[*Glares at MARY and gives TAD a final shake, then lets him stand free.*]—deliberately, deliberately, I say, turned the hose on me! [*ALL turn and look sternly at TAD.*]

TAD [*defiantly*]. I taught you! [*Takes swipe with his sleeve at water on his own face.*] I taught you to call my father a damn fool!

LINCOLN [*the incident unimportant*]. You were coming to me —Dispatches?

STANTON [*stepping into room and over to U C*]. Yes, sir.

[*Hands him an envelope. LINCOLN faces downstage as he scans the contents, rapidly running his hand over his brow.*]

LINCOLN. You'll call the Cabinet?

STANTON. Yes, sir.

LINCOLN. I'll see them at once.

MARY [*graciously*]. And perhaps you'll make peace with Tad, Mr. Secretary? I believe he's a fighter the War Department might yet have use for. [STANTON glares at her—then his sense of humor asserts itself.]

STANTON [*smiling*]. I believe you're right, Madam President. [*Crosses back to archway, holds out his hand to TAD, who hesitates and retreats a step*]. Shall we turn off the hose, Taddie? [TAD suddenly smiles and takes STANTON'S hand, and they go off together D R.]

MARY [*watching them go, smiling, then turning to LINCOLN, who has slumped in his chair*]. Bad news?

LINCOLN [*slowly and emphatically, in tones of bitterness*]. Seven long days of bloody fighting—and McClellan's still on the defensive—burning our supplies—[*Gets up and begins to pace from U R C to U L, rubbing his hair.*—]abandoning huge stores of equipment for the enemy to turn against us. I tell you, Mary, he could crush Lee and capture Richmond, but he won't strike! [*Strikes one hand hard in palm of other.*]

MARY [*twisting her hands nervously*]. There must be something you can do.

LINCOLN. If I had a courageous, resourceful general, like Lee——

MARY. Isn't there anyone?

LINCOLN [*nodding*]. There is. Stanton will get him—as soon as he finishes out West. You don't understand, Mary. We need action now!

MARY [*shocked*]. You mean we might be defeated? [*Moves to U C.*]

LINCOLN. Not if we keep on fighting . . . In the long haul the industrial North will win over the agricultural South. It's just——[*Strides impatiently down room, then turns sharply.*] There's a contagion in defeat. People may get sick of the war, agree to any terms to end it. [*Pauses and speaks with prophetic force.*] I tell you, Mary, if the South wins, slavery will be fastened on this land for a thousand years!

MARY [*crossing to C*]. Then we must put forth our full spiritual strength this very day!

LINCOLN. Our spiritual strength? [*Pauses in his striding at U L C and, after a slight pause, turns sharply on her.*] Our spiritual strength? You're thinking of emancipation?

MARY [*tensely*]. Yes.

LINCOLN. I've been working on it lately. It's somewhere around. [*Rummages through desk drawers.*] Here it is. [*Almost apologetically.*] I'm only waiting for the time to be ripe.

MARY [*who has faced around*]. The time has come!

LINCOLN [*impatient and disturbed, crossing to L C*]. I've spent sleepless nights—frantic days—trying to avoid doing it this way. [*Turns and faces her.*] It may mean the utter ruin of the South!

MARY [*emphatically*]. Better that than to go down with them.

[*Unnoticed by them, TAXPAYER enters R and stands quietly just inside door. Her manner is quiet and respectful. She senses at once that she has entered at a serious moment and stands motionless, listening.*]

LINCOLN. I'd hoped to free the slaves gradually—so I could compensate the owners. But I can't do that while they are at war with us.

MARY [*flaring*]. Gradually is too slow! [*Pauses, puzzled.*] Someone else said that to me, years ago in Lexington.

LINCOLN [*absently, as he scans the document*]. Your father, perhaps?

MARY [*thoughtfully*]. No, it wasn't Father. [*Snaps her fingers.*] It was Cash Clay! He said, "Gradually is too slow—tomorrow is too late."

LINCOLN [*repeating it thoughtfully*]. Tomorrow is too late—Perhaps it is! [*Nods and speaks in measured tones.*] Perhaps it is! Still—Mary, there are abolitionists out there—[*Gestures toward window.*]—who've urged emancipation from the first. They'd like to see every slave owner begging in the

streets, people who were born to a way of life and never chose it——

MARY. They chose it when they cast in their lot with the South and took up arms against their country. [*Crosses to him and speaks with great earnestness and force.*] This I know, you cannot compromise with evil. My father tried to do that—I've lived through it and I know what that means. And slavery is the absolute evil.

LINCOLN [*slowly, spreading out the document*]. Slavery—the absolute evil——[*Pauses.*] Yes, gradually is too slow. [*Sits heavily in chair at table* U C. MARY and TAXPAYER watch, motionless.] It must be done now. [*MARY brings the pen from desk and he signs his name on paper.*]

MARY [*voice hushed with awe*]. You've really done it? You've signed the Emancipation Proclamation?

LINCOLN [*unsmiling*]. I've really signed it . . . oh, there'll be more to it than this. I'll read it at the Cabinet meeting Stanton's calling. They may want to delay the formal announcement until we have some sort of victory to pin it to. But it is signed. It becomes the law of the land on the given date.

MARY [*hardly heeding*]. It's signed! I knew when I wakened this morning that today would be the happiest day of my life!

LINCOLN. It won't be easy. It doesn't only mean that the slaves walk free——

MARY. Big things are never easy.

LINCOLN [*with tinge of bitterness*]. We may be repudiated by the very people we've tried to serve——

TAXPAYER [*taking a step into room, speaking almost timidly*]. Excuse me, sir, ma'am——

LINCOLN [*turning sharply and rising*]. Who are you?

TAXPAYER [*with dignity*]. I'm a taxpayer.

MARY. You can't just walk in here——

TAXPAYER [*cutting in, but speaking with dignity and conviction*]. Yes, I can, ma'am. It's folks like me you govern for.

[*Turns to LINCOLN.*] I've come a long way to see you, Mr. President, and I'm not goin' away until I've said my say.

MARY. But——

LINCOLN [*silencing her with a gesture*]. What is it, ma'am?

TAXPAYER [*with the earnestness and force of one who renders the verdict of the people*]. I saw what you just done, and I've watched keeful ever'thing you've done. And it come to me, I ought to say, "*Thank you, Mr. Lincoln.*" You're *doing well*. Both of you are doing *real well*. And now I'll just say good-bye.

LINCOLN [*crossing to R C, smiling and shaking her hand*]. Good-bye, and thank you!

TAXPAYER. Good-bye, Mr. Lincoln—good-bye, ma'am. [*Goes out U R C.*]

MARY [*touched*]. The kindness of people! It's good to be reminded. [*Crosses to LINCOLN'S side, looks down at her clasped hands and turns her wedding ring with her finger. She speaks wistfully.*] Do you remember, Abraham?

LINCOLN [*speaking absently*]. Remember?

MARY. The words you had engraved inside my wedding ring: "Love is Eternal."

LINCOLN [*looking fully at her and putting his arm around her*]. It is.

MARY. And the miracle of love is that it is stronger than hate. Now, at last, I am *certain* that we *won't be defeated*. [*There is a sound outside window as of an excited crowd.*]

LINCOLN [*gesturing toward window*]. Something has happened out there.

MARY [*crossing to window, looking out*]. Why it's the Taxpayer. She's telling them something. Why—she told them! They're all excited——Some of them are shaking hands and some of them are weeping, and—and a few of them are singing. Can you hear? [*Outside, a few voices begin to sing softly the opening lines of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic,"—"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the*

Lord," continuing it as if in the distance through the following speeches. MARY leaves window and comes toward LINCOLN at R C.] It's a big thing you've done today. These people hear it now, and others will hear of it. The news of it will go down the Mississippi. They'll hear of it at Fairview, and the Negro mothers will come in from the cotton fields and pick up their babies—and no one will dare to stop them! And slavers will put down their whips—and the chains will rust away.

LINCOLN [*softly*]. Mary——

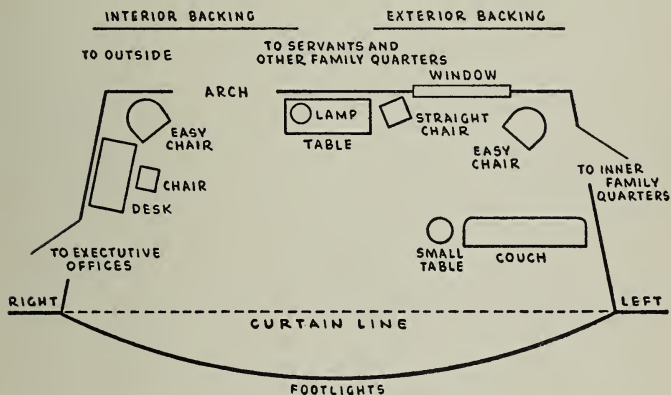
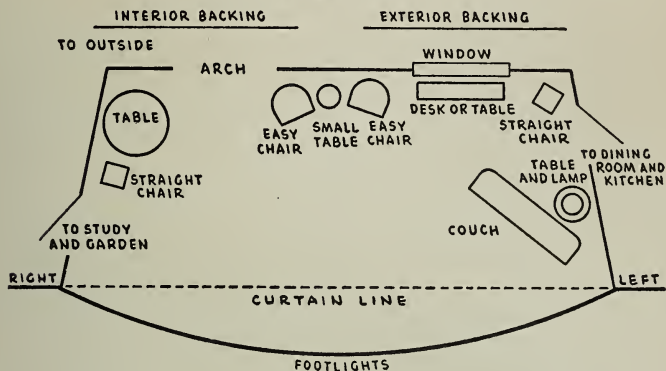
MARY [*not heeding; her eyes are on far places*]. Word of it will creep up all the little bayous of the Mississippi to slaves who were sold down the river. It will come to great plantation houses where the moss hangs heavy on the live oaks, and the house slaves will repeat it in the poor, broken slave quarters out of sight at the back. Tamar will hear of it! She'll know that she can seek her daughter and her husband. The family I saw sold will hear of it . . . they can be together again—[*Turns directly to LINCOLN and speaks with passionate devotion.*]—and they'll have you to thank. *You did it!*

LINCOLN [*brokenly*]. Not alone, Mary. . . . I couldn't have done it without your love and faith and the help of Almighty God. [*Draws MARY close to him. Outside, the voices swell out triumphantly:—*

"As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on."}]

CURTAIN

STAGE CHART



NOTE: The charts on this page suggest only rearrangements of furniture within the same basic set.



